The Real Ranjit Singh



BY FAKIR SYED WAHEED-UD-DIN

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Maharaja Ranjit Singh

FOREWORD

By

The Right Honourable Lord Hailey

P.C.,O.M.,G.C.S.I.,G.C.M.G.,G.C.I.E.

I have been happy to meet Fakir Syed Waheed-ud-Din's request for a Foreword to his book, for it has brought back to me many memories of my work in the Secretariat of the old Panjab Province, now nearly sixty years past. It was then part of the duty of junior Secretariat officers to keep in touch with the History of the families which might be entitled to seats in Viceregal or Provincial "Durbars". The main source of information on which we then relied was the work originally compiled by Sir Lepel Griffin, first published, I think, in 1865 and entitled "The Panjab Chiefs". This showed that there were then six members of the Fakir family entitled to seats as "Durbaris". I can well remember my own astonishment on learning that the progenitor of this family, who though he was the close friend and most trusted councillor of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, had elected to choose for himself and to maintain for his family the title of Fakir, thus insisting on taking credit for the humility of their origin. It was not less astonishing that he, a Moslem, had succeeded in maintaining his position against the Sardars or other leaders of the different sections of the Sikh community which had so recently succeeded in ousting the authority exercised by local representatives of the Moghul Emperors.

It was obvious that after the death of the Maharaja himself, the family had suffered a progressive reduction in

its position, for later editions of Sir Lepel Griffin's work showed a falling off in the number of its members who were entitled to seats as "Durbaris". Looking lately at an edition issued in 1940, I find in fact that it is stated there that "at the present time there is hardly any gentleman of outstanding importance among the descendants of this historic family."

I think, however, that this must have been an overstatement of the real position, for the Fakir family seems to have remained well off, owing to the liberality of the grants of land, or the "jagirs" which had been made by the Maharaja to Fakir Azizuddin and to his brothers, Fakir Imamuddin and Fakir Nuruddin, who also held important posts in the Maharaja's lifetime.

But the object of Fakir Syed Waheed-ud-Din in his present book has not, I assume, been to seek any enhancement of the position of his family. His object has, I think, been to illustrate from his family archives those features of the Maharaja's character and rule for which he has himself so legitimate an esteem, and to justify the importance which historians have assigned to the part played by the Maharaja in the history of the Panjab, at a very critical period of its development. He has no doubt sought at the same time to cast a more intimate light on the relations between the Maharaja and Fakir Azizuddin. On both counts we must, I think, welcome a work which can rely on records so authentic as those which the Fakir family can claim to possess.

HAILEY

London, 30th January, 1965

PREFACE

This book does not pretend to be a standard biography or a work of historical research. It is a plain and simple pen-portrait of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as my ancestors knew him in real life. "The Fakir Family's Ranjit Singh" could well have been chosen as its title.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my late uncle, Fakir Syed Jalaluddin, for the loving care with which he preserved his part of the relevant family papers and paintings and to his son, Fakir Syed Mughisuddin, for his courtesy in making them available.

An equal debt is due from me to my friend, Mr. Hadi Hussain, formerly of the Indian Civil Service and the Civil Service of Pakistan, for his valuable advice and help in writing this book. Because of my varied worldly preoccupations, the book may never have seen the light of day but for Mr. Hadi Hussain's co-operation; and, if this is not more prominently acknowledged, it is only because he maintains that the "vision" informing the portrait presented here is the exclusive possession of the Fakir family—an argument to which I have no answer.

Fakir Syed Waheeduddin

"ALFAKIR"
27-C, Gulberg,
Lahore.

For assistance with final proof reading the author wishes to thank
GEOFFREY GLAISTER

INTRODUCTION

Ranjit Singh was of the stuff that legendary characters are made of, and legend has claimed him for its own. He continues to live and grow in the people's imagination, and it has been history's unceasing task to make his historical personality live up to its legendary counterpart. There was that about him which makes men more memorable than their achievements. Men's achievements date; but if there is something about the men themselves, something besides their achievements, which is worth preserving, the memory of mankind sees to it that it is preserved; and it has other means of doing so besides history. History is after all concerned primarily with events and deals with men only as they appear in the events—as counters on the chequer-board of politics and not as creatures of flesh and blood. As creatures of flesh and blood, some of them prove larger than history. Ranjit Singh was such a one.

As achievements go, Ranjit Singh's were remarkable by any standard. Heir to one of many petty chiefdoms that had sprung up on the ruins of the Mughal Empire, he rose to be the ruler of a powerful state extending from Tibet to Sind and from the Khyber Pass to the Sutlej. He was a rival as well as a friend and ally — both feared and respected — to the British power in India, which held sway over the rest of the sub-continent. He avenged the innumerable defeats, humiliations and depredations suffered by India over the

centuries at the hands of Afghan invaders by reconquering part of the Indian territory wrested by them and, more than that, by being an arbiter in the fate of Afghanistan herself. These and other achievements of his have been recorded by historians in various ways: by some in an admiring, by others in a derogatory, and by still others—a small minority—in an impartial manner. No two accounts of them substantially agree about facts, dates, places, persons, motives, etc. But, however they were recorded, they ceased to have more than an academic significance with the end of Sikh rule soon after Ranjit Singh's death. Since then the mist of time into which they have receded has been thickened by the mist of distance which veils a large part of their scene from the Sikhs. They have thus become mainly the concern of the professional historian. Not so the man behind them.

Ranjit Singh still lives, large as life, in the imagination of the people. He does so not only where the Sikhs now live, but also where they lived before; for the Muslim village-folk shared him as a legendary figure with the Sikhs and they have not let him depart with the latter. The image that persists of him is that of a popular king well known to his people through his frequent appearances in their midst, ready to listen to them and to redress their grievances at all times, and looking upon all his subjects, irrespective of caste and creed, with one eye. That the one eye in his case was literally so seems to have been the subject of innumerable good-natured jokes, which, it is said, he would not only ask people to repeat in his hearing, but to which he himself contributed. There are even stories of this physical defect of his having been hurled at him with impunity by common people to drive home to him some grievance which they thought he should have but had not redressed personally. It is immaterial whether these stories are true or false. They can only have gained currency because they fit in with Ranjit

Singh's reputation, and he must have won that reputation by exhibiting in other ways the qualities implied in the stories. In short, Ranjit Singh's popular image is that of a kindly patriarch rather than that of a conquering hero or a mighty monarch. He was all three, but his humanity has outlived his splendour and power. Meteoric as his historical career was, the star of his fame as a man shines with a milder and steadier glow; and it has a friendly twinkle in its eye. This book is a response to that friendly twinkle — a response which has been due for a long time from the author and his family.

Three of the author's ancestors were among the men nearest to Ranjit Singh, both in his public and in his private life. Fakir Syed Azizuddin was his Foreign Minister, Fakir Syed Nuruddin his Home Minister and his personal physician, and Fakir Syed Imamuddin one of his principal administrative officers. These men helped him to establish his kingdom on a firm footing and were with him till the last. They were among his chief counsellors and assistants, not only in affairs of state but in many matters behind the scenes. They have left valuable accounts, not only of happenings in and around the court, but of Ranjit Singh's day-to-day life. They have also left documents, paintings and other mementos of the Maharaja and his court. More than all these things, they have left the author a legacy of affection and admiration for the man who was Ranjit Singh. This book is an attempt to discharge as best he can the duty that has for long rested on the author's shoulders of adding what is in his possession to the world's knowledge of that fascinating man. It is hoped that what is presented here will help in the conversion of his popular image into a full-blooded portrait, a true likeness of the man behind the events by which history remembers him.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

FACSIMILES

(All illustrations from the collection of the Fakir family.

PART ONE

THE FOUR COMMANDMENTS

Chapter I

The Mysterious Apparition

Ranjit Singh entered Lahore Fort as a conqueror on July 7, 1799. Wandering away from his men, he made for the Samman Burj, an octagonal tower on the side of the river Ravi. Peering into the darkness before entering, he was taken aback to see the form of a tiger. He turned to go away; but he heard a voice calling him from inside the tower, "Ranjit Singh, don't be frightened, come in." The voice had something about it which made him obey. On entering, he found himself in the presence of a frail, white-bearded old man of medium height, who motioned to him to come up and, when he had done so, prophesied that he would soon establish an independent kingdom of the Punjab. He also admonished the youthful conqueror to observe four rules of conduct, which would ensure the increasing strength and prosperity of his kingdom. These rules were as follows:—

1) To say his prayers every morning without fail.

2) Never to hold court sitting on the throne of the Mughal emperors.

3) To treat his subjects equally, without distinction of caste or creed.

4) To respect and befriend Fakir Syed Ghulam Mohiuddin of Lahore, a godly man who had been appointed spiritual guardian of the new state and whose sons would serve it truly and well.

Ranjit Singh never mentioned this incident to anybody until, many years later, he was compelled to relate it to Iwaz Khan, chief keeper of the royal elephant stables. Iwaz Khan, who had great faith in holy men, had called upon a wandering fakir who was staying temporarily in the Garhi Shahu mosque, and the fakir had commissioned him to ask the Maharaja whether he had been observing the commandments of the holy man whom he had met in Lahore Fort. When Iwaz Khan carried out the commission, Ranjit Singh turned pale and began to perspire, although it was winter. It was some time before he collected himself and related his experience to Iwaz Khan, enjoining upon him complete secrecy until after his death. Iwaz Khan kept his faith, and it was only after Ranjit Singh's death that he narrated the story to Fakir Syed Qamruddin, through whom it came into the archives of the author's family.

The literal truth of the story is not of much importance. The author believes it, but he does not expect all his readers to do so. What is really important about the story is its symbolic significance: it is an epitome of Ranjit Singh's state policies and his personal conduct.

Chapter II

A True Sikh

Ranjit Singh was a devout Sikh. His daily routine began with early morning prayers. He would have his bath, dress, put on his arms and go to the prayer-room, where he would listen to a recitation from the Holy Granth. After that he would place over his eyes and forehead the "marvellous Kalghi" of Guru Gobind Singh. Only after he had gone through this whole routine would he sit down to transact the day's business. So great was his faith in the Granth Sahib that he never took any big decision or launched upon any important undertaking without seeking its guidance. On occasions he would take auguries from it even in minor matters. He was, however, not a zealot or a bigot and like all genuinely religious people had a healthy dislike for cant and humbug in religious matters. This seems to have been misunderstood by some foreign visitors to his court. For example, Victor Jacquemont in his "Letters from India" says of him, "He is a Sikh by profession, a sceptic in reality. Every year he pays his devotions to Amritsar, and what is very singular, at the shrines of several Muhammadan saints, yet these pilgrimages offend none of the puritans of his own sect." Similarly, W. G. Osborne writes in his "Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh": "Though he is by profession a soldier, in religion he is in reality a sceptic, and it is difficult to say whether his superstition is real, or only a mask assumed to gratify and conciliate his people." Again, W. L. M'Gregor in his "History of the

Sikhs" says: "With regard to Ranjit's own religious character it is somewhat doubtful if he has any fixed system, but as the sovereign of the Sikhs, who follow the religious tenets of Nanak, modified by Guru Gobind, it is politic on his part to support the religion, which he does in the most munificent manner." The fact of the matter is that, far from being either merely superstitious or hypocritical or politic, Ranjit Singh was deeply religious. He had a profound reverence for all that was holy and spiritual, irrespective of what religion it pertained to. His visits to the shrines of the Muslim saints and Hindu temples were as much acts of faith as those to the Golden Temple or to Taran Taaran, and to all of them he gave donations, jagirs and presents with equal generosity. These offerings of spirit were of a piece with the veneration he paid to the holy men of all religions and all orders. He sometimes went to the length of stepping down from his throne and wiping the dust off their feet with his long, flowing beard. Many Sikh pujaris, Hindu bhagats and Muslim fakirs received this tribute of royal humility in open durbar. Nor did he ever set at naught the injunctions of his own religion. On a visit to the Akal Takht he was adjudged guilty of violating a sacrosanct canon. He at once bared his back for the Akali in charge of the Akal Takht to lay the whip across. If these acts can be characterized as superstition or hypocrisy, so can all religion.

•

Fakir Azizuddin has handed down accounts of many incidents in which Ranjit Singh's belief in spiritual things and his catholicity of religious outlook exhibited themselves spontaneously. On one occasion the Maharaja and the Fakir were out walking in the outskirts of Lahore, when they met a bullock-cart carrying what looked like a huge book. The Maharaja stopped the bullock-cart and asked the driver what he was carrying. "Maharaj," replied the driver, "I am a calligraphist and this book is a manuscript of the Holy



Fakir Syed Azizuddin

Quran which is my lifetime's work. I am on my way to Hyderabad to sell it to the Muslim king of that country. I hear he is a very pious and generous man." The Maharaja turned to Fakir Azizuddin and said, "This man seems to think that there is nobody this side of Hyderabad who is pious and generous enough to pay him a good price." Then he asked the calligraphist, "How much are you expecting, my good man?" The calligraphist named what would be a huge sum for a manuscript of the kind even today — ten thousand rupees. Before the Minister could intervene, the deal had been closed. "Fakir Ji," commanded the Maharaja, "please see to it that the man is paid ten thousand rupees from the state treasury." Soon after the manuscript had been acquired, the Maharaja asked Azizuddin to read out to him a passage from it. Azizuddin read out the Sura Yusuf (Chapter on Joseph) and then translated it for the Maharaja's benefit. "But Fakir Ji," remarked Ranjit Singh, "the Granth Sahib says the same kind of thing. What is the difference?" "None, Your Highness," replied the Fakir, "the goal is the same, only the paths are different." The Maharaja rewarded Azizuddin for this apt remark by making a gift of the manuscript to him.

An apocryphal version of this incident makes it more dramatic than it really was. The calligraphist, so the story goes, approached Fakir Azizuddin in the Maharaja's palace. The Fakir praised the work, but expressed his inability to pay what the calligraphist was asking for it. The Maharaja, it seems, overheard the argument and, as the man was going away, had him intercepted and brought to him. The man told him that he had been to all the Muslim princes in India except the ruler of Hyderabad and that none had agreed to pay him a fair price. The Maharaja took the manuscript from him, pressed it against his forehead as he would have pressed a copy of the Granth Sahib and ordered that the price the

man was asking for it be paid to him. When, later on, the Foreign Minister remonstrated, the Maharaja replied, "God intended that I should look upon all religions with one eye. That is why he took away the sight of the other. This is a holy book. I paid not only the price of the man's labour, but also a tribute to God."

Another story, originating with Fakir Nuruddin, illustrates Ranjit Singh's open-mindedness about the outer forms of devotional acts. One day the Maharaja and Fakir Nuruddin were sitting facing each other and saying their beads — two devout men of different religions praying together. The Maharaja had a precious rosary of onyx beads and the Fakir one of Kahu wood. The former was counting the beads towards himself and the latter away from himself according to the practices of their respective faiths. Suddenly the Maharaja asked, "Fakir Ji, what is the correct way of saying one's beads?" "The object of saying one's beads, Your Highness", replied the Fakir, "is to take God's name. If you are praying for God's grace, you should move the beads inwards; if for warding off evil, then outwards." The reply pleased the Maharaja so much that he presented his own rosary to the Fakir.

It was Ranjit Singh's policy to enable all the communities to observe their religious practices with complete freedom, but sometimes contradictory demands from the various communities presented him with awkward problems. The following incident is typical of the way in which he used to help the communities to understand each other's point of view and thus resolve their differences themselves. A deputation of Sikhs from a part of Lahore waited upon the Maharaja and complained that they were finding it impossible to put up any longer with the loud voice of the muezzin in the local mosque five times a day, and they made the drastic demand

that azan should be stopped. The Maharaja looked interrogatively at Fakir Azizuddin, who was in attendance. "Azan, Your Highness," said the Fakir, "is a call to prayer and, since the Muslims' prayer is congregational, they obviously cannot dispense with it." The deputation, however, persisted in its demand. The Fakir then said, addressing the Maharaja, "Your Highness, are these people willing to undertake that they will go to every Muslim's house and summon him to prayer five times a day?" The Sikhs agreed to this arrangement and it was decided that azan should be abandoned in favour of it. But a week later they came back, looking more worried than ever, and prayed for azan to be reintroduced. "We now understand," they confessed, "why the Muslim religion has adopted this particular system of calling people to prayers."

In keeping with Ranjit Singh's liberal views, he and the royal family used to take part alike in Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious festivals. The Maharaja on a few occasions was even present at Id-ul-Fitr, although that is a strictly religious festival, and during Muharram young princes used to make offerings (nayaz) just as if they had been Muslims. Ranjit Singh's Hindu, Muslim and Sikh subjects equally reciprocated his warm interest in their religions by remembering him in their prayers on important occasions — when he launched a new campaign, when he won a new victory, when he had a hairbreadth escape, when he was ill or recovered from illness, and finally, during his last illness and at his death and funeral. The total impression one gathers from the author's family papers and from the stories its members have been telling each other from generation to generation is that there was complete religious harmony during Ranjit Singh's reign. All the communities looked upon him not only as their protector but as one of themselves. He was a Sikh in the tradition of the founder of Sikhism,

who used to join Muslims in their prayers and worship in Hindu temples and who made pilgrimages to Mecca as well as to Hindu holy places. Guru Nanak had summarised his faith in the simple words, "There are no Hindus, there are no Muslims." If there had been any Sikhs at that time, he would no doubt have added, "There are no Sikhs", in the same sense. Ranjit Singh brought Guru Nanak's tenet up to date and then acted up to it. Born and brought up in the Sikh faith, he worshipped as Sikhs do, but he did so, remembering all the time these words of Guru Gobind Singh, last of the Gurus and compiler of the final version of the Adi Granth:—

> "He is in the temple as He is in the mosque.
>
> He is in the Hindu worship as He is in the Muslim prayer.
>
> Men are one, though they appear different."

Chapter III

The Throne of the Mughals

When Ranjit Singh assumed the throne of the Punjab, it was not a throne in the literal sense that he sat upon. He turned down all suggestions about his sitting on the throne of the Mughal emperors and continued to hold durbar sitting cross-legged in one or other of the chairs in which he had sat as a chieftain and none of which had any resemblance to a royal throne. Sometimes he held durbar in an even more informal manner, sitting on a carpet and reclining on a velvet cushion. He was equally firm about adhering to his simple chieftain's turban without adding any royal emblem to it. He cut short the blandishments and remonstrances of his courtiers with the blunt remark, "I am a peasant and a soldier, and do not care for external pomp. My sword is enough to win for me all the distinction I need." Folie de grandeur was none of his weaknesses. He used to dress simply in plain silk or cashemere cloth, shunning gaudy robes except on very special occasions when they were indispensable. He was similarly modest in wearing jewellery. Generally he wore none; but when he received foreign visitors, he would wear a row of pearls or a string of diamonds. It was only on very important state occasions that the Koh-i-Noor (after he had acquired it) was displayed on his person in addition to one or both of these.

This ascetic indifference to personal adornment was all the more remarkable for his keen sense of delight in beauty,

colour and gaiety in his surroundings. The men around him — his councillors, courtiers and military officers — were among the best-looking and most magnificently dressed men of their time. Good looks were, in fact, among the most important credentials for admittance to his immediate circle. In his harem he had a collection of the choicest beauties drawn from all parts of his kingdom. He had a passion for beautiful horses and gaily caparisoned elephants. He adored jewellery and loved to see it on the persons of the people around him, so much so that at times he himself presented jewellery to his courtiers if he felt that they could not afford it. Fakir Azizuddin tells a story which shows how easily this weakness of his could be exploited. One day Sardar Sham Singh Atariwala came to the durbar wearing an impressive looking necklace of emeralds. The necklace was missing when he came on the following day. The Maharaja noticed this and commented on it. The Sardar informed him that the jeweller from whom he had taken it on approval wanted seventy thousand rupees for it, whereas he was willing to pay only fifty thousand. As this price was not acceptable to the jeweller, the necklace had been returned. The Maharaja ordered seventy thousand rupees to be given to the Sardar and commanded him always to wear the necklace to court.

Fakir Azizuddin seems to suggest that Ranjit Singh's lack of interest in his looks and dress arose from an utter lack of personal vanity and humble acceptance of a disadvantage which it had pleased God to inflict on him. He knew that, with his deeply pitted face, his blind eye and his diminutive figure, his appearance was the least part of his personality and he wasted no time or money on trying to improve it. His mind was intent on bigger things, in comparison with which it counted for little. Fakir Azizuddin endorses the famous exchange of pleasantries on this subject between Ranjit Singh and his favourite courtesan-queen, Moran.



"Darbar Khas" of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

Moran, who was allowed to take liberties with him, asked him, "Maharaj, where were you when God was distributing good looks?" "I was busy," rejoined Ranjit Singh, "getting His angels to put me down for a kingdom to be won by force of arms." Azizuddin does not explain how this dialogue, which must have taken place in the privacy of the harem, leaked out. But we can well guess that Moran must have gone about circulating it in order to impress people or that, more probably, Ranjit Singh himself narrated it to his inner circle in one of those moments when he used to exchange confidences with them. Whatever may have been the truth of the story, the point of it is that Ranjit Singh bore his physical deprivation with grace and good humour.

Then there is the well-known exchange of remarks, endorsed by Azizuddin, between Ranjit Singh and Phula Singh, a particularly aggressive member of the Akali sect. One day, while the Maharaja was passing under Phula Singh's balcony riding on an elephant, the latter shouted down at him, "O you one-eyed man, who gave you that he-buffalo to ride on?" Ranjit Singh looked up smilingly and said with mock-humility, "Your Honour, it is a gift from you." The ironical implication in the rejoinder was that Phula Singh, as an Akali leader, thought himself to be the personification of the Khalsa Sarkar, to whom the elephant ultimately belonged.

Instead of detracting from his personality, Ranjit Singh's lack of good looks added to it by acting as a foil to his other qualities — a peasant-like simplicity of demeanour which thinly veiled an intelligence of the highest order; a disarming frankness of speech, punctuated by long intervals of tactful silence, which encouraged his interlocutors to speak their minds; an easy informality which yet commanded respectful and correct behaviour in his presence; a hearty manner which drew the line at familiarity. The title of "Lion of Lahore" which

he won by his deeds of daring had something physically apt about it in so far as the effect of his presence was concerned. There was an aura of natural majesty about him which threw his courtiers, fine-looking and splendidly dressed men that they were, into the shade and made them feel proud of serving him. Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of British India, when he received Fakir Azizuddin at Simla, asked him which of the Maharaja's eyes was blind. The Fakir writes that, proud as he was of his master, this reference to a physical defect of his displeased him very much. He, however, summoned all his wits to his aid and replied, "Your Excellency, the Maharaja has a single eye like the sun. (According to Hindu mythology, the sun-god has only one eye. If he had two eyes, he would have burnt the world to cinders.) Just as nobody dare take a full look at the sun, I have never dared to cast my eyes at the Maharaja's face. They are always fixed on his feet. If you wish to have some information about his feet, I may be able to give it to you." Lord William Bentinck was so impressed with this reply that he took his gold watch out of his pocket and presented it to the Fakir. It is still part of the family collection. While making the present, he remarked, "So long as Ranjit Singh has men like you to serve him, no harm can come to his kingdom."

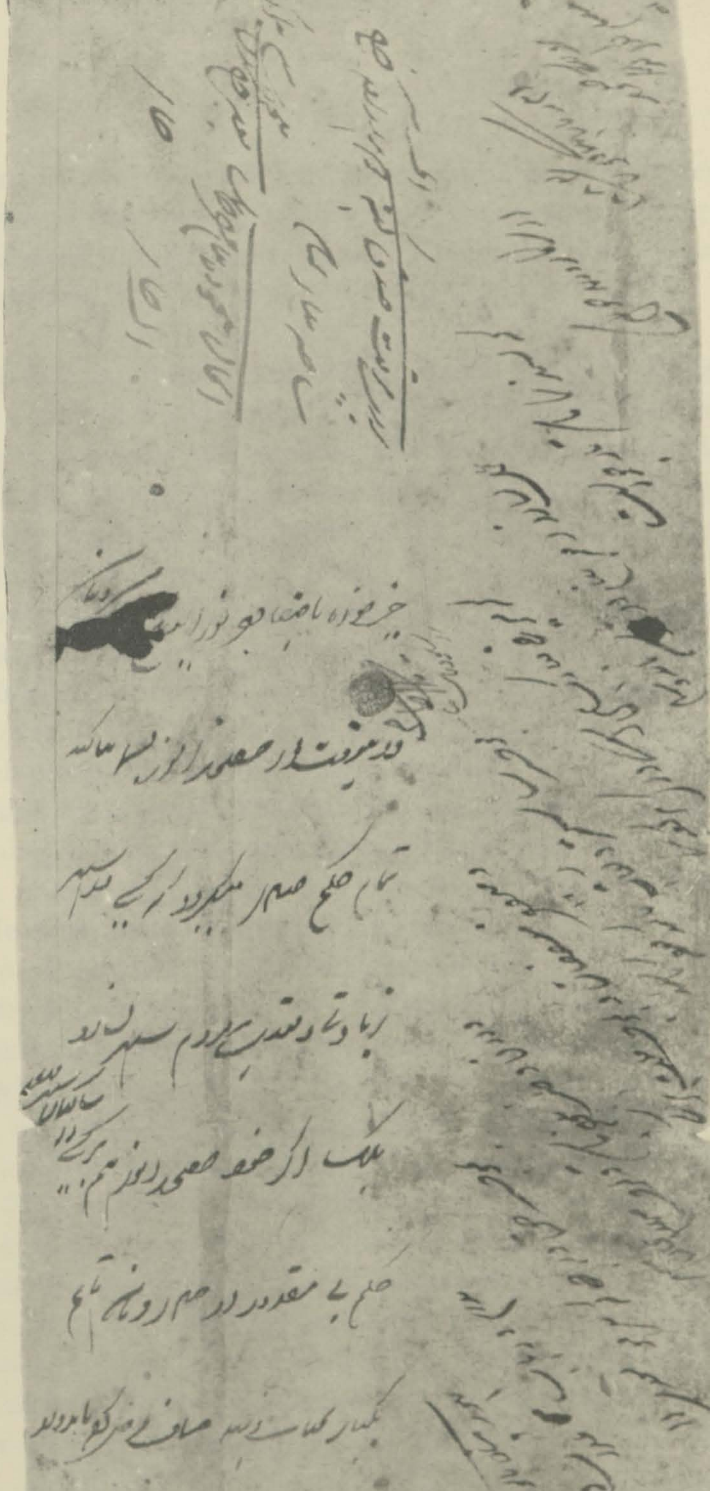
This quality of inspiring respect sufficed by itself to secure what protocol Ranjit Singh needed in his court. There was, in fact, no formal protocol, but only a simple set of practical conventions which grew up in course of time. The object of these conventions was twofold: firstly, to place the ministers and councillors in such positions as to enable them to be heard according to their importance and, secondly, to secure for the common people easy access to the Maharaja's presence. In spite of the informality of the general atmosphere, the councillors used to address him with a studied respect and never spoke without a sign from him. This example was

followed by the common people present—the petitioners and their witnesses. "People of the pen" among the councillors used to sit on the Maharaja's right, with Fakir Azizuddin in front, and "people of the sword" on his left, with Raja Dhian Singh in front.

In the early days Ranjit Singh liked to be addressed by the plain and simple title of "Singh Sahib", a title applicable to any member of the Sikh gentry. The older Sikh chiefs even addressed him occasionally as "Brother." It was long before he allowed the title of "Maharaj" to become the usual form of address in speaking to him. As time went by, he became so used to being spoken of and spoken to as "Maharaj" that he began to refer to himself as such in the honorific third person plural. But Fakir Azizuddin points out that he used to do so in such an unself-conscious manner that there was never a trace of pride in it. Sometimes he would use the first person plural, but his way of doing so never sounded any different from the common practice of colloquial Punjabi in this behalf. He was often at pains to impress upon his courtiers that the true King was the Guru and he only the Guru's humble servant. He always referred to his government as Khalsaji or Sarkar Khalsa, and if he referred to himself or allowed others to refer to him as Sarkar, the title was intended only as an impersonal designation indicating the source of his authority. Both Azizuddin and Nuruddin mention that the Maharaja would sometimes explain the meaning of his name to his courtiers. He would say that, while the literal meaning of "Ranjit" — the meaning which his father had apparently intended when choosing this name for him in preference to his original name, "Budh Singh" — was "victorious", its real significance to his mind lay in this that it had been the name of one of Guru Gobind Singh's drums. Both the Guru's drum and he announced the victory of the Khalsa, but were in themselves nothing — mere instruments.

His coinage, which was called Nanak Shahi, bore the legend, "Hospitality, the sword, victory and conquest unfailing to Guru Gobind Singh from Nanak." He struck no coins in his own name.

According to Fakir Azizuddin, Ranjit Singh's decision against sitting on the throne of the Mughal emperors proceeded from both modesty and wisdom. He felt that it would look assertive for him to hold durbar sitting on a throne from which the whole of India used to be ruled whenever the Mughal emperors visited Lahore. He would have run the risk of reviving nostalgic memories in the minds of his Muslim subjects. Alternatively, he would have risked being looked upon as a self-appointed viceroy of the Mughal Emperor in Delhi, even if the latter was in no position either to sanction or to challenge this. The decision involved a high degree of self-denial for a small chieftain-warrior who had succeeded in gaining a kingdom; but Ranjit Singh had the humility to take it and the strength of character to stand by it to the last. He was amply rewarded for this by the political advantages it carried. It signified that he was the founder of an entirely new kingdom, which derived its legitimacy from the Panth Khalsaji, the mystic entity in which resided all sovereign powers pertaining to the Sikh community, and not — whether by force or by consent — from the Mughal Emperor, who, in fact, had long since ceased to exist so far as the Punjab was concerned. He became the *de jure* as well as the *de facto* successor to the Mughal empire in the Punjab by filling the void left by its disappearance. He thus inherited the throne of the Mughal emperors in the full symbolical sense without sitting on it in the physical sense. It was this which made him as acceptable to the Muslims as to the Hindus and the Sikhs among his subjects.



Facsimile of Farman I

Chapter IV

The Subjects' Rights

Below is given a translation of two orders issued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh about the dispensation of justice. The orders, which bear the royal seal, are still in the archives of the author's family and photostat copies of them are given in this book.

I. "Sincere Well-wisher, Fakir Nuruddin Ji, May you be happy.

It is hereby decreed by His Highness with the utmost emphasis that no person in the city should practise high-handedness and oppression on the people. Indeed, if even His Highness himself should issue an inappropriate order against any resident of Lahore, it should be clearly brought to the notice of His Highness so that it may be amended. Protector of Bravery Malwa Singh should always be advised to dispense justice in accordance with legitimate right and without the slightest oppression and, furthermore, he should be advised to pass orders in consultation with the Panches and Judges of the city and in accordance with the Shastras and the Quran, as pertinent to the faith of the parties; for such is our pleasure. And should any person fail to act in accordance with your advice or instructions, you should send him a formal letter so that it may serve as a proof on the strength of which His Highness may punish him for disobedience.

Despatched from the Court of His Highness.

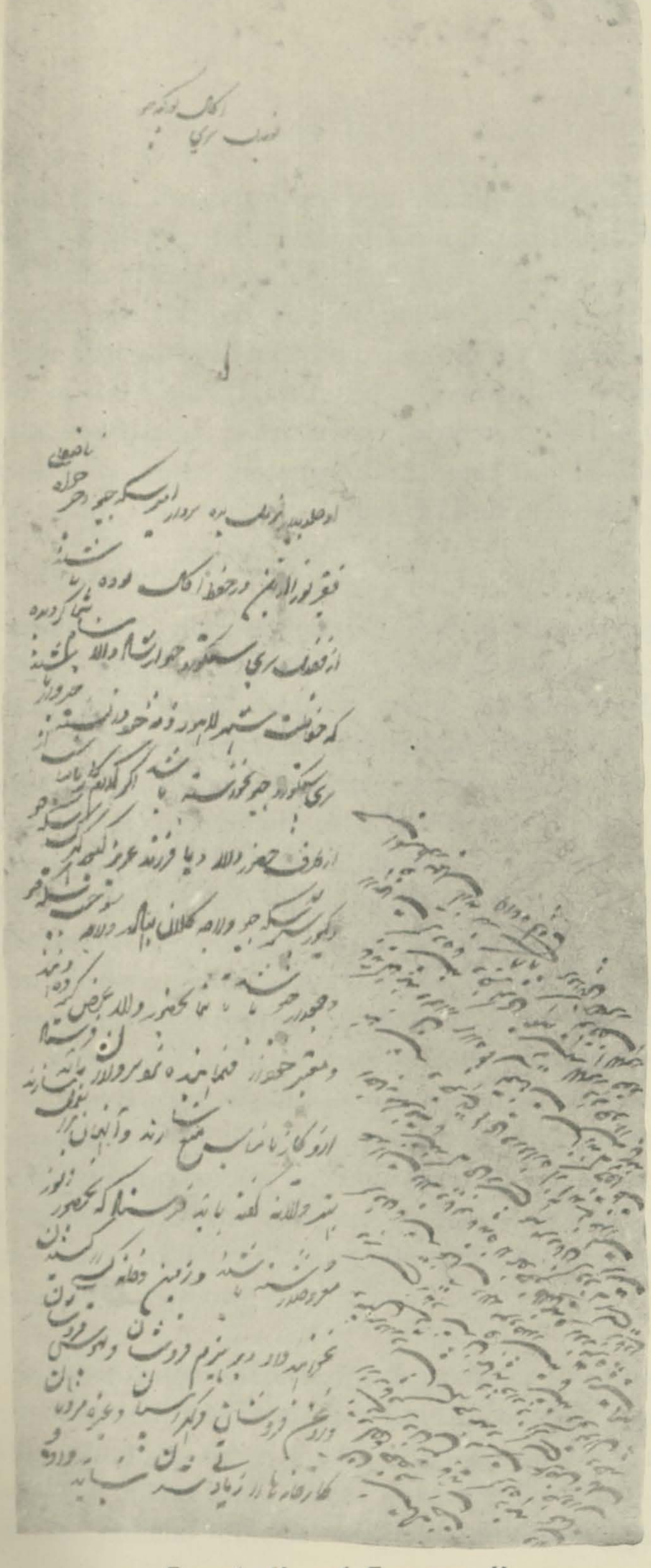
31 Bhadon, 1882 Sambat

For repairs to the old ditch an expenditure of two thousand rupees is hereby sanctioned.

For the present the salary of Fakir Sahib, Rs. 1500/-. After expenditure on the said ditch, the salary of Sher Dyal, Rs. 500/-."

II. "Ujjal Didar Nirmal Budh Sardar Amir Singh Ji and our sincere well-wisher, Fakir Nuruddin Ji, May you live long by the grace of Sri Akal Parakh and enjoy the protection of Sri Akal Budh.

By the grace of Sri Sat Guruji, the exalted command is issued to you that, deeming yourselves to be responsible for the security of Lahore, you should take care of the duties pertaining thereto. Sri Sat Guruji forbid, if His Highness, his beloved son Kharak Singh Ji, Kanwar Sher Singh Ji, the Raja Kalan Bahadur, Raja Suchet Singh Ji, or Jamadar Ji should commit any inappropriate act, you should bring it to the notice of His Highness. Secondly, you should send your trusted representative to the Sardars with instructions to refrain from committing inappropriate acts. If the Sardars act according to your instructions, well and good; otherwise you should send word to them that you will bring the matter to the notice of His Highness. Moreover, you should not permit forcible possession to be taken of any person's land or any person's house to be demolished. Nor should you allow any high-handedness to be practised upon woodcutters, fodder-vendors, oil-vendors, horse-shoers, factory-owners, etc. In such cases also you should prevent the oppressor from oppression. You should administer matters in the same way as Sardar Desa Singh Ji, should not permit anybody to be treated harshly and should forward to His Highness any petitions



Facsimile of Farman II
(See Page 32)

intended for him. Furthermore, you should daily send for Chand Mall, Kotwal of the Royal Court, and Babu Panda, and obtain from them news of all happenings so that every person's rights are secured and no person is oppressed. The frames of the city gates should be caused to be repaired from the revenue of the Court. Hazara Sawars should be appointed to watch the roads and, considering the security of the whole of Lahore city as your responsibility, you should act in accordance with this decree. Dated Lahore, 19 Pos, 1888 Sambat".

These orders are not models of royal draftsmanship by any standard—ancient or modern, western or eastern. But they are unique in one respect: they throw overboard the time-honoured legal fiction upon which the fact of kingship is based — that the king can do no wrong. It was characteristic of Ranjit Singh to acknowledge that, both as a man and as a king, he was fallible and to provide against any possible adverse effects of his fallibility upon the rights and well-being of his people. Ranjit Singh has often been described by Western writers as an Oriental despot. Even when they have recognised his humanity, his urbanity or his liberal-mindedness, they seem to have done so with a mental reservation, as if it were impossible for an Oriental monarch to have these qualities without being at the same time essentially a despot. Despotism connotes not only absolute rule, but also oppression, tyranny and arbitrariness. A man who could issue orders of the kind reproduced above cannot be called a despot in any sense of the term.

Nor were these orders mere isolated attempts to introduce an element of orderliness into an otherwise chaotic state of affairs. The administration of justice was well-organised by the standards of the time. There were regular courts presided over by judicial officers which administered justice

under the customary law of the district or the caste. These courts were open to all persons who wished to be governed by customary law, whether Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. Besides these, there were special courts for Muslims, where shariat law was administered. One of Ranjit Singh's first acts after the conquest of Lahore was to revive the offices of the hereditary Kazis and Muftis which had been prevalent in Mughal times. Kazi Nizamuddin was appointed to decide disputes relating to marriage and divorce among the Muslims, while Muftis Mohammad Shahpuri and Sadulla Chishti were entrusted with powers to draw up title-deeds relating to transfers of immovable property. The old mohalladari system was reintroduced, each mohalla being put under the charge of an influential person. The office of Kotwal, or prefect of police, was conferred upon Imam Bakhsh and additional guards were placed at the gates of the citadel. Fresh walls and a moat were built round the city.

In the sphere of land and land revenue administration Ranjit Singh maintained intact the system that had prevailed under the Mughals. The system guaranteed a fair return — half the gross produce — to the cultivator and protected him against excessive exactions by landlords, revenue collectors and government officers. Preference was given in most matters to the actual cultivator; non-cultivating proprietors and jagir-dars enjoyed no more than a nominal title.

Like all Oriental monarchs Ranjit Singh was in the habit of receiving petitions and listening to complaints in the course of passing through the streets. The general method was for the petitioner to lie down in the path of the royal procession or shout for the Maharaja's protection from amidst the crowd. He would decide some matters on the spot and pass others down to one or other of the officers accompanying him. So sharp was his memory and so keen his interest in

seeing justice done that he often inquired about the cases subsequently and looked into them after they had been decided by the lower authorities. There were not a few occasions when the personal knowledge he had gained helped him in confirming or altering the decisions of his officers. He had a petition box placed in a part of the palace accessible to everybody and kept the key of the box in his own possession. The petitions put in the box were read out to him and he used to take suitable action on them.

While crime had been rampant under his immediate predecessors, the Bhangis, it was reduced, practically to the point of abolition, during his reign. This was due to effective preventive action, a more settled life for the people, increased prosperity and improved administration of justice. Punishments were humane. For example, there was practically no capital punishment, which even modern governments have not been able to abolish. It was not awarded even when an attempt was made on the life of the Maharaja himself.

In the apportionment of public offices Ranjit Singh took special care to see that each community received its due share, not only in the lower but also in the higher ranks, and especially in and around the court. The key posts in his civil and military administration were held by people belonging to various communities and hailing from different parts of the world — Muslims, Sikhs, Khatris, Brahmins, Dogras, Rajputs, Pathans, Italians, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Americans and so on. His criteria in selecting them were merit and loyalty. He had a sure eye for merit and an unfailing capacity of inspiring loyalty. Thus the men he selected worked their way up, many of them from the lowest rung of the ladder, and remained with him to the last. The Prime Minister, Raja Dhian Singh, was a Dogra. One brother of his, Raja Gulab Singh, was a high-ranking administrator and another, Raja Suchet

Singh, was a high-ranking military officer. Jamadar Khushal Singh, a converted Brahmin from Meerut, was deorhidar (Lord Chamberlain), while his brother, Bhaia Ram Singh, was Prince Kharak Singh's dewan and his nephew, Raja Tej Singh, a military officer of rank. Raja Dina Nath, Raja Sahib Dyal, Raja Ralia Ram, Dewan Ajudhia Parshad and Pandit Shankar Nath, all of whom held important posts, were also Brahmins. Dewan Sawan Mal, Governor of Multan, was a Khatri. Among the Muslims, Fakirs Azizuddin, Nuruddin and Imamuddin, Kazi Nizamuddin and Mufti Muhammad Shah and several others held key positions. Prominent Sikhs among the courtiers and councillors were Sardar Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, Sardars Chatar Singh, Sher Singh and Sham Singh of the house of Atariwala and Sardars Deva Singh and Lehna Singh of the house of Majithia. The Maharaja's generals also came from different communities. Dewan Mohkam Chand, his son Prem Dyal, his grandson, Ram Dayal, and Misr Dewan Chand were Hindus. Hari Singh Nalwa, Fateh Singh Kalianwala, Fateh Singh Dullewalia and Nihal Singh Atariwala were Sikhs. Allard, Ventura and Avitabile were Europeans; Ilahi Bakhsh and Mian Ghausa were Muslims; and Balbhadra was a Gurkha. These are only some of the brightest stars in the cosmopolitan galaxy which was Ranjit Singh's court. His ministers, advisers, administrators and soldiers would have done credit to any government. As regards Muslims in particular, the author's family archives contain lists of Muslim officers in the higher and middle echelons. Among the top-ranking Muslim officers there were two ministers, one governor and several district officers. There were forty-one high-ranking Muslim officers in the army, two of them generals, several of them colonels, and the rest holding other important ranks. There were ninety-two Muslims who were senior officers in the police, the judiciary, the legal department and the supply and stores departments.

Thus, while the ruler was a Sikh, the government was run by an elite corps composed of members of all communities. This gave Ranjit Singh's regime the character of a secular system of government, even though it was built upon theocratic foundations.

Chapter V

The Fakir Family

Of the three Fakir brothers who held high office under Ranjit Singh the first to be introduced to him was Azizuddin. He accompanied his father, Ghulam Mohiuddin, when the latter was summoned to treat the Maharaja for an eye ailment soon after his conquest of Lahore. Then came Nuruddin and, finally, Imamuddin. The family traces its origin to a famous holy man, Syed Jalaluddin, a native of Arabia, who converted the still more famous Hulaku Khan of Bokhara to Islam, married one of his daughters and travelled with her to the Punjab, where he finally settled down. From Jalaluddin's residence in Bokhara the family acquired the name of "Bokhari"; but since Ranjit Singh's time that name has yielded place to the title of "Fakir". The title was first assumed by Ghulam Mohiuddin by popular acclaim because of his piety; but it was Azizuddin in whose case it first gained official recognition. This happened in a way typical of the relations between Ranjit Singh and his Foreign Minister. In the beginning Ranjit Singh used to address Azizuddin as "Shah Ji", as was and still is customary in the Punjab in addressing Syeds. One day, when the Maharaja was particularly pleased with Azizuddin, he said to the latter, "Shah Ji, I wish to give you some title which will stick to your family from generation to generation. Can you suggest one?" "Maharaj," replied Azizuddin, "if it is your pleasure to do

so, then be gracious enough to grant me a title which will not sound too big if future generations of my family should become poor and which will have an added grace if they should remain rich or become richer still." "What about Fakir?" asked the Maharaja. "Your father is already spoken of by that title." "There could be no better title than that for me and my family," assented Azizuddin. So the title was formally conferred, along with a gift of two valuable shawls of orange-brown (gerwa), the colour distinctive of ascetics.

Fakir, a word of Arabic derivation, is in common parlance used to denote a mendicant; but that is its corrupted meaning. In the language of mysticism and religion it has the opposite connotation: it means one who is content with what God gives him in the way of his material needs and strives only for spiritual riches.

Azizuddin had a place of his own from first to last in the Maharaja's esteem and confidence. The Maharaja never undertook any important operation without or against his advice. It was due to his wise counsel that the Maharaja maintained friendly relations with the British Government; and the fact that these relations were on a footing of equality and mutual respect was largely an outcome of his ardent loyalty to Ranjit Singh, his inborn tact and his great skill in negotiation. In 1808, when British troops were moved up to the river Sutlej in pursuance of the British policy of confining Ranjit Singh to the north of the river, the Maharaja felt so annoyed that he was determined on war. But Azizuddin, with great foresight, dissuaded him from this hazardous course and skilfully steered the mutual relations of the two powers towards a friendship which stood many tests and which proved of great value to Ranjit Singh.

Azizuddin proved still more useful to Ranjit Singh in his dealings with the Afghans. An instance of this is provided by the manner in which he handled Amir Dost Muhammad Khan. When Dost Muhammad Khan advanced with a large army towards Peshawar with the intention of recovering the city from Ranjit Singh, the latter went out with an opposing army under his own command to stop the Afghans' advance. Azizuddin was sent ahead to Dost Muhammad's camp as an envoy for a negotiated settlement. He was given a hostile reception. According to Josiah Harlan, an American officer, who accompanied Azizuddin as his assistant, the Amir, as soon as they arrived at his camp, swore at them, saying, "Ah you kafirs, I have taken you in." Fakir Azizuddin protested against this manner of receiving envoys whom the Amir had agreed to receive. There followed a heated religio-political debate between Afghan courtiers on the one side and Azizuddin on the other. Azizuddin outshone the Afghans with his great learning and his equally great gift of ornate speech. Amir Dost Muhammad Khan listened with rapt attention and applauded more than once. Azizuddin had all but succeeded in his mission, when a courtier who had remained silent all this time suddenly struck a discordant note. "Fakir Sahib," said he to Azizuddin, "it is surprising that with all your religious learning and your piety you are advocating the cause of an infidel against that of a Muslim Amir." The Fakir unrolled Amir Dost Muhammad's insulting ultimatum to Ranjit Singh and put it before the courtier. "This letter clearly shows," he said, "that the Amir is fighting for territory and not for Islam. Is it not my duty as a good Muslim to be true to my salt and to defend my country against aggression?" While the debate was still in progress, Ranjit Singh, guessing its trend and anticipating its outcome, advanced and almost surrounded the Afghan camp. Amir Dost Muhammad was left with no choice but to retire. In doing

so he tried to carry off Azizuddin with him in order to use him as a hostage; but the attempt miscarried.

Fakir Azizuddin was a man of learning and not a soldier by profession. Nevertheless, so great was Ranjit Singh's confidence in his all-round ability and his fidelity that he entrusted several difficult and delicate military assignments to him. He was sent to annex the Gujrat chiefdom of Sahib Singh Bhangi; to reinforce the garrison at Attock after it had been surrendered by Jahan Dad Khan; to receive the fort of Phillaur from Dewan Kirpa Ram on the latter's fall from grace; and, finally, to assume charge of Kapurthala, Jandiala, Hoshiarpur and the estate of Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, who had fled across the Sutlej to seek British protection. There were even occasions when Ranjit Singh proceeded with his whole army on distant military expeditions, leaving Azizuddin in charge of the defence of Lahore with a few junior officers.

It was during Ranjit Singh's last days that the close relationship between him and Azizuddin reached its climax — a sad one. When in December 1838 Ranjit Singh had a stroke of paralysis, the third in less than two years, he completely lost his power of speech and could only communicate by means of signs. Azizuddin was one of the only two courtiers — the other being Bhaia Ram Singh — who could interpret the sign language. So well did Azizuddin know the Maharaja's mind that the least little sign by the latter — made with his speechless tongue, his single eye or his one good hand — sufficed to convey the Maharaja's meaning to him. This, however, meant sitting in close attendance in the Maharaja's rooms for long hours, almost round the clock, day in and day out. Some people who were present during this illness of the Maharaja have left on record their admiration for this marathon exercise of devotion and love. They say that even



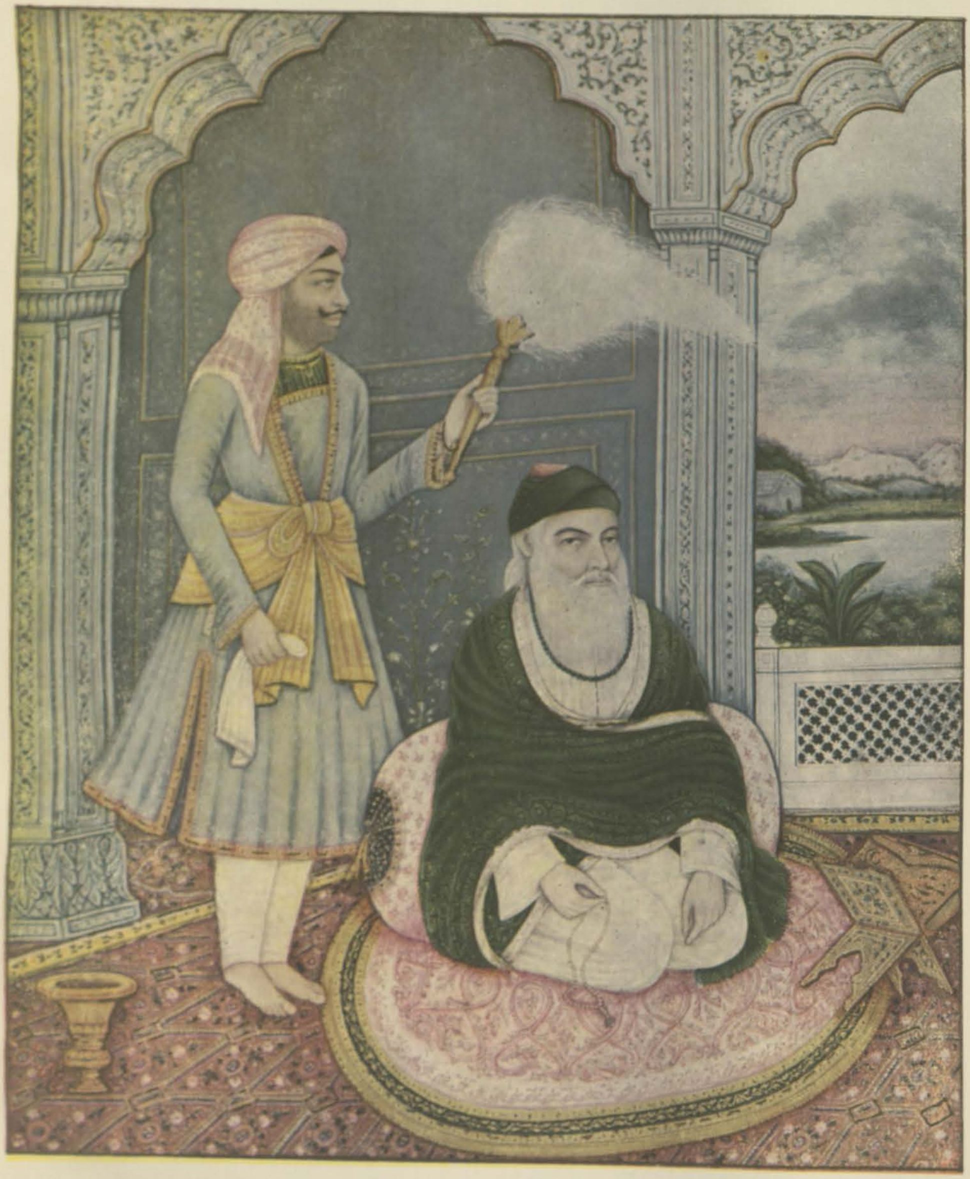
Prince Sher Singh on "Dooloo"

a son could not have done more for his sick father. During Ranjit Singh's last illness, Azizuddin surpassed even this feat of endurance, sustained by the abundance of affection in his heart for his dying master and friend. It was, therefore, to him that Ranjit Singh turned, as he had always done in important matters in the past, for advice as to the succession and for ensuring that it would take place smoothly. Fakir Azizuddin advised the investiture of Prince Kharak Singh as the Maharaja's successor with Raja Dhian Singh as his Chief Minister, and the advice was accepted and acted upon. This was not a simple matter to advise on or decide, since the second prince, Sher Singh, had always been considered to be a serious rival to Kharak Singh.

As Ranjit Singh's Home Minister — his man about the Court — Fakir Nuruddin had a whole host of duties attached to him. He was physician royal, apothecary-general, almoner, director of the royal palaces and gardens, one of the three custodians of the keys of the royal treasury, commandant of the arsenal at the fort, a judge extraordinary, keeper of the Maharaja's judicial conscience, and what not. These multifarious duties brought him into constant personal contact with the Maharaja, who learned to respect him for his integrity and piety. There developed between the two men in course of time a kind of spiritual bond. Thus, without being a member of the Maharaja's Council, Nuruddin wielded a good deal of personal influence with him. Not seldom this influence was called to their aid even by members of the royal family. There are several accounts in the author's family papers of instances of this. The most significant of these was one in which Prince Sher Singh, second son of Ranjit Singh, was saved by Fakir Nuruddin's intervention from a premature end of his princely career. It happened like this. Sher Singh had for a long time had an eye on one of the Maharaja's favourite horses, named "Dooloo", and had several times

unsuccessfully approached his father for the gift of it. One day, when he could not any longer curb his desire to possess the horse, he went to the royal stables and ordered the darogha to saddle the horse for him to take out for a ride. The darogha complied, thinking that the prince would return the horse after the ride. The prince, however, had other designs. After his ride, he sent the horse to his own stables. When many days had passed without the horse having been returned to the royal stables, the darogha got frightened and reported the matter personally to the Maharaja. The Maharaja flew into a rage. There used to be two signs of his being angry. One was the twirling of his moustache and the other fanning himself with his handkerchief, the latter being the more dangerous of the two. On this occasion it was the latter sign that evinced itself. The Maharaja ordered that the prince be exiled and everything belonging to him forfeited. The order was carried out forthwith in so far as seizure of the prince's property was concerned. Before, however, the order of exile could be executed, the prince ran to Fakir Nuruddin, who was his tutor, and asked him to intercede on his behalf with the Maharaja. The Fakir upbraided the prince for his improper conduct, but promised to see what he could do to win the Maharaja's pardon for him. In the evening, when the Fakir, as was his daily wont, presented himself to the Maharaja, the latter angrily complained to him against his pupil. "Maharaj," said the Fakir, "you have punished him far too lightly. He took away the horse as if it was his father's property." The Maharaja burst into laughter on hearing this witty truism and not only ordered the return of the prince's property and the cancellation of his exile but also granted Dooloo to him along with the royal trappings.

One extremely important duty of Fakir Nuruddin as Apothecary-General was to supervise the Maharaja's food. It was prepared under the supervision of Hakim Bishan Dass,



Fakir Syed Nuruddin

a trusted assistant of Fakir Nuruddin, and tasted in the presence of the latter by a team of professional tasters, having been served to them in special poison-detecting plates. The effect of the food on the tasters was watched for two hours. After all these processes the food was put into special containers having locks, and the locks were put under Fakir Nuruddin's personal seal. The Maharaja never partook of any food without satisfying himself about the seal.

The third of the Fakir brothers, Imamuddin, was not a figure about the court, but he held important administrative and military posts upcountry. During a great portion of Ranjit Singh's reign he was custodian of the key fort of Gobindgarh at Amritsar and governor of the country immediately surrounding it. Along with these duties he also held charge of the magazine, arsenals and royal stables there. He also saw military service in a number of campaigns, as, for example, in the operations against the forts of Sada Kaur and the Kanhayas.

Since the Fakir brothers' close connection with Ranjit Singh's government is the *raison d'etre* of this book, the author trusts that it will not be considered immodest on his part if he gives three excerpts about them from standard books on Ranjit Singh, which contain tributes to the quality of these men, as typical of the Maharaja's chief councillors and trusted servants. The first excerpt is from Sir Lepel Griffin's "Ranjit Singh":—

"The most conspicuous figure in the eyes of foreigners visiting the court of the Maharaja was Fakir Azizuddin, his Foreign Minister.... He was celebrated as the most eloquent man of his day, and he was as able with his pen as with his tongue. The state papers drawn up by him are models of elegance and good taste, according to the Oriental standard. He was

himself a ripe scholar in all branches of Eastern science, and was also a generous and discriminating patron of learning.... As a poet, Azizuddin may be allowed a high place.... He is now dead, but for many years I enjoyed his intimate friendship and I have never in India met a man of more refined manners, or a greater flow of eloquence of the florid Persian order.... Nuruddin especially enjoyed a very general respect in the country, and, after the war of 1846, when Raja Lal Singh was deposed for treason, Nuruddin was appointed one of the Councils of Regency to carry on the administration until the majority of the infant Maharaja Dhulip Singh. The elder brother was ordinarily known at the court by the title of the Fakir Sahib; not that the style of Fakir which the family were proud enough to retain signified, as the word ordinarily implies, any vow of poverty, for the brothers were all wealthy."

The second excerpt is from an official report submitted to the Governor-General of British India, which has been reproduced in W. L. M'Gregor's "The History of the Sikhs":—

"This worthy man (Fakir Azizuddin) never ceases to watch over the interests of his master, who, in return, treats him with the most marked kindness and respect.... The fukeer is of a most humane disposition, and he deems it cruel to deprive even the insect of life: though obliged to witness the death of animals while on hunting excursions with his master, he confesses that he never sees a hare start before the dogs without offering up his prayers for its escape.... These traits will show the mild and gentle disposition of this worthy man."

The third excerpt is from Professor Narendra Krishna Sinha's "Ranjit Singh":— "He (Azizuddin) styled himself as a fakir and adopted the dress of a fakir. This he regarded



Fakir Syed Imam-ud-Din

as an armour in the court of Lahore, which was, in its later days, so full of intrigue. . . . His personal attachment to Ranjit Singh was very great. . . . With so much power in their hands, had these Muhammadan officers been so inclined they might have added one more party to the list of three that arose on the death of Ranjit Singh. In addition to the Court, Dogra and Sindhianwalla parties there might have been a Muhammadan party resting on the support of the Fakir brothers, the Muhammadan officers in charge of the artillery and the Muhammadan population of the Punjab. To the honesty of Azizuddin and his younger brothers there is no better testimony than this that the confidence Ranjit Singh reposed in them was never misused."

These excerpts speak volumes by implication about Ranjit Singh, both as a man and as a ruler. It is not every king who is served or likes to be served by men of this character.

as an avenue for the [illegible] of Indians, which was, in its later [illegible] far [illegible]. . . . His personal attachment to Ranjit Singh was very great. . . . With so much power in their hands, had these Mohammedan officers been so inclined they might have added one more party to the list of those that arose on the death of Ranjit Singh, an addition to the Court, Dogra and Sindhanwalia parties, there might have been a Muhammadan party relying on the support of the Fakir brothers, the Muhammadan officers in charge of the artillery, and the Muhammadan population of the Panjab. To the honour of Azizuddin and his [illegible] brothers there is no [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] the moment the Ranjit Singh [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].*

These examples speak volumes by implication about Ranjit Singh, both as a ruler and as a man, for he was a King who [illegible] to be served by men of this character.

PART TWO

THE MAN OF DESTINY

CHAPTER I

The Jigsaw Puzzle of the Punjab

Sikh historians give a very interesting account of a meeting between Babar, the founder of the Mughal empire, and Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. They say that when, after two unsuccessful invasions of India, Babar was marching towards Delhi in 1525 to try his luck once again, a number of prisoners were produced before him at Eminabad, a small town in the Punjab. At the sight of one of them, he stood up from his seat and exclaimed to his minister in Turanian, "What! here in flesh and blood is the holy man who appeared to me in a dream at Ghazni and invited me to invade India for the third time, prophesying my victory." The holy man was Guru Nanak. Babar addressed him with great respect and asked him to express some wish which he could fulfil. Guru Nanak asked only for the release of the prisoners, which was carried out forthwith. He then blessed Babar and prophesied that, if he and his successors treated their subjects justly without distinction of caste or creed, his dynasty would rule over India for centuries.

Guru Nanak's prophecy was fulfilled along with the condition upon which it was contingent. The Great Mughals gave India two centuries of benign and efficient rule, the benefits of which were enjoyed equally by all the communities. Sikhism, with its message of peace, goodwill and brotherhood, found the climate congenial and flourished. Relations between the government and the Sikhs, so long as they remained a

purely religious community, left nothing to be desired on either side. When, however, the Sikhs began to entertain political and territorial ambitions, trouble arose. Even so, they continued to enjoy their religious rights.

It was Guru Gobind Singh who gave shape to the political and territorial ambitions of the Sikhs. He set before them the goal of a Sikh national state to be achieved in the fulness of time. To this end he baptised a number of warriors, named them Singhs (lions) and charged them with devoting their lives to fighting for the supremacy of the Khalsa, the pure, the chosen people, that is to say, the Sikh community as a whole. Guru Gobind Singh, the last Guru, was a contemporary of Aurangzeb, the last Great Mughal. With Aurangzeb's death in 1707 and that of Guru Gobind Singh a year later, two historical epochs which had begun simultaneously also ended simultaneously — the epoch of Mughal greatness and that of the spiritual evolution of Sikhism. Thenceforth the emerging temporal power of the Sikhs was one of the serious contenders for fragments of the decaying empire of the Mughals.

Guru Gobind Singh's successor, Banda, the first temporal leader of the Sikhs, made a bid for establishing a Sikh state in the Punjab; but, after some initial success, the attempt came to grief. The Sikh military fraternity broke up except for a few bands (or jathas, as they called themselves) that took shelter in the hills and jungles on the borders of the Punjab. These men prowled about on the highways, living off the neighbouring villages and looting passing caravans. When Nadir Shah's grand caravan of elephants, camels, horses and mules was going back to Persia, loaded with the plundered wealth of Delhi, they got their first opportunity of helping themselves to something really worthwhile. They were unable to relieve him of the Peacock Throne and the

Koh-i-Noor, which were too well-guarded; but all the same they took some of the 30 crore rupees' worth of loot that he was carrying off. They also liberated some of the prisoners he was taking away with him. The nine invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali, which followed in quick succession, gave them an equal number of similar opportunities of enriching themselves, equipping themselves with arms, liberating captives, enhancing their reputation among the local people as national heroes, and increasing their numbers by enlisting followers.

Ahmad Shah's invasions progressively weakened the Mughals and strengthened the Sikhs. By the time he had finished he had destroyed the last vestige of Mughal rule in the Punjab, leaving behind nothing but anarchy. The Sikhs took full advantage of this state of affairs. During the interval between Nadir Shah's withdrawal and Ahmad Shah's first invasion they had already laid the foundation of what late developed into the misldari system. Groups of villages had been banded together under the leadership of the most daring of the jathadars. These formed small independent politico-military units, all equal in status, as their name, "misl", which means "like" or "equal", implied. When Ahmad Shah's first invasion was imminent, the Sikhs convened a congregation of their general body, the Sarbat Khalsa. There they regrouped the jathas into twelve misls, each undertaking to contribute to a common body of fighting men, which they named the Dal Khalsa, placing it under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The Dal Khalsa was not able to offer any effective resistance to Ahmad Shah; but, as soon as his back was turned, its leaders occupied old forts of the Mughals or constructed new ones and garrisoned them. From these forts they offered protection to the neighbouring villages in return for a tax. This system, which was called *rakhi*, helped the misls to evolve into full-fledged chiefdoms, each under a ruler with a territory to rule, a standing army and a regular

source of income in the form of revenue and taxes. The process went on, with a few vicissitudes, throughout the period of Ahmad Shah's invasions. By the time of his death, in 1772, the Sikhs had acquired the major portion of the Mughal territory between the Indus and the Jamuna and divided it into twelve misls. Six of these were in the territory between the Indus and the Sutlej, known as Majha, while the other six were in the territory between the Sutlej and the Jamuna, known as Malwa. The families that established the misls in Majha were the Ahluwalias, the Bhangis, the Kanhayas, the Ramgarhias, the Nakkais and the Sukerchakias; those that established the ones in Malwa were the Phulkias, the Singhpurias, the Krora Singhias, the Nishanias, the Dullewalias and the Shahids. The only body to which the misls owed allegiance was the Sarbat Khalsa or the Panth Khalsaji as a whole, which had been consecrated by Guru Gobind Singh as the sovereign authority of the community. The only link that held them together was the defence of the Panth. For the rest, they were feudal chiefdoms, forming collectively a loose theocratic commonwealth, very different from the single theocratic state of Guru Gobind Singh's conception. While Ahmad Shah's invasions had lasted, they had been getting together to offer some resistance to him, mostly in the form of guerilla warfare. Once the external danger ceased to exist, they began to indulge in the favourite sport of feudal chiefs, namely, territorial self-aggrandizement, often at each other's expense. This process in due course threw up five leading misls, viz., the Bhangis, who held Lahore, Amritsar and most of western Punjab; the Kanhayas, who possessed the Himalayan foothills; the Ahluwalias, who ruled over the territory between the Ravi and the Beas; and the Sukerchakias, whose domain was confined to the town of Gujranwala and a few neighbouring villages.

These misls subsisted cheek by jowl with a congeries of other small states. There were, first, the principalities of Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Mankera, Peshawar, Bannu, Tank and Hazara, which had been annexed by Ahmad Shah and made over to tributary Pathan chiefs. Then there were a number of hill chiefdoms ruled by Rajput princes with their strongholds perched on the inner ranges of the Himalayas. Lastly, there were a few martial clans of the Punjabi Muslims which had established independent chiefdoms, such as the Pathans of Kasur, the Chatthas of Rasulnagar, the Tiwanas of Shahpur and the Sials of Jhang. Such was the jigsaw puzzle whose pieces were put together by Ranjit Singh to form the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab.

Chapter II

From Budh Singh to Ranjit Singh

In founding the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab, Ranjit Singh fulfilled the dream which had been dreamt by Guru Gobind Singh a century earlier. The intervening generations of Sikhs, including his own ancestors, had been slowly giving shape to the dream but without the consummating power of his genius it might never have been fulfilled. His own family's contribution began with his great - great - great grandfather, Budh Singh, who, it is said, was one of the Khalsas baptized by Guru Gobind Singh to devote their lives to desultory warfare to win for the Sikhs the material power which they needed to survive. He left behind him a legendary fame as a daring freebooter of the Robin Hood class and a patrimony consisting of a few villages for his sons. Budh Singh's son, Naudh Singh, became the first sardar of the Sukerchakia misl, by fortifying the village of Sukerchak and banding together a number of Khalsas under his command. Naudh Singh's son, Charhat Singh, moved the headquarters of his misl from Sukerchak to Gujranwala and erected embattlements round the town. So strong had he become that he repulsed a punitive attack by the Afghan governor of Lahore with considerable loss to the latter and annexed a few more towns and villages to his misl. Some years later he had to flee before Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan king, who demolished the embattlements; but, as soon as the Abdali's back was turned, he came back and re-erected them, not only

regaining possession of his domain but also making some additions to it. He was killed by the bursting of his own matchlock during a foray into Jammu, in which a rival misl, the Bhangis, had joined issues with him; but his fourteen-year-old son, Maha Singh, carried on his mission of increasing the estate and power of the Sukerchakias. One step he took towards this was to marry Raj Kaur, the daughter of Ganpat Singh, Chief of Jind, commonly known as Mai Malwain. Having strengthened his position, he turned to Jammu a few years later in the footsteps of his father. He was opposed by the Kanhayas, who were then the most powerful misl; but the opposition came to an end when the Kanhaya chief's only son was killed in a skirmish; and it was turned into an alliance by the betrothal of the Kanhaya chief's granddaughter, Mehtab Kaur, to Maha Singh's son, Ranjit Singh. The alliance became closer when, soon afterwards, the Kanhaya chief died and his widowed daughter-in-law, Sada Kaur, succeeded to his misl.

Like many other things connected with him, Ranjit Singh's date and place of birth are still matters of controversy. According to one theory, he was born on November 13, 1780 in the small fortress town of Budru Khan, the paternal home of his mother, Raj Kaur. According to two other theories he was born either on November 2 or on November 13, 1780 at Gujranwala. According to still another theory he was born in 1776. The author's family papers throw no light on the subject, which may, therefore, be left where it rests until, if ever, historical research settles it.

The only authentic event of Ranjit Singh's early childhood is that he suffered from an attack of smallpox, which spoiled his looks for ever by depriving him of his left eye and deeply pitting his face. For the rest, all that is known about his childhood is that he used to spend most of his time swimming,



Sardar Maha Singh

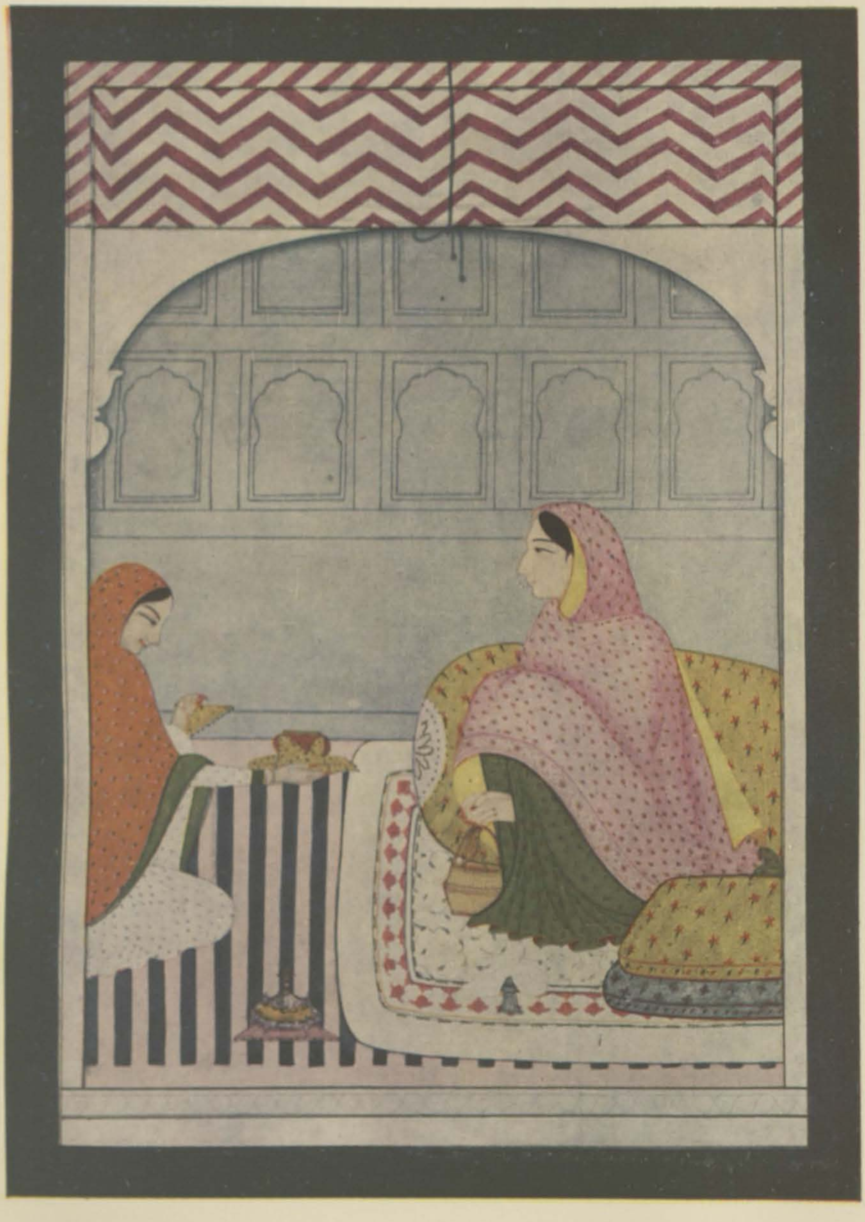
riding and hunting, with compulsory annual pilgrimages to Amritsar to bathe in the holy tank and attend the gurumata or council of chiefs. He had no time to learn to read and write and never got beyond the Gurmukhi alphabet, but he took some lessons in musketry and swordsmanship. One habit of his early childhood days which is mentioned by some of his biographers is that, whenever he went out for hunting or swimming, he would take money and things with him and distribute them among his poorer playmates.

When Ranjit Singh was only twelve years old, Maha Singh, who had laid siege to the fort of Sodhran, where Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat had taken refuge after refusing to pay tribute to the Sukerchakias, was suddenly taken very ill with dysentery. He appointed Ranjit Singh as the head of the misl in his own place, put him in command of his forces and returned to Gujranwala. This encouraged the Bhangi Sardars of Lahore to rush to the relief of Sodhran. Ranjit Singh, however, cleverly ambushed and defeated them before they could reach the fort; but he returned to Gujranwala too late to meet his father before the latter died.

Managing an estate was not as easy for a boy of twelve as winning a battle. Ranjit Singh let his father's manager, Lakhpat Rai, continue in charge of the estate. But, while his mother supported Lakhpat Rai, her brother, Dal Singh, wished to throw him out and take his place. He found a ready ally in Sada Kaur, Ranjit Singh's mother-in-law-to-be, who kept intriguing from Batala, with occasional visits to Gujranwala. Disgusted with the constant quarrelling that this led to, the young chief used to spend most of his time out hunting. Even his marriage to Mehtab Kaur, which was celebrated when he was hardly sixteen, brought about no change in his mode of life. The marriage was only a political alliance, and both the parties

knew this. Even if Mehtab Kaur could reconcile herself to her husband's looks, it must have been difficult for her to forget that his father had been the cause of her own father's death. On Ranjit Singh's side, a natural diffidence arising from the consciousness of his plain looks was a big enough barrier by itself. Added to it was a feeling that Mehtab Kaur and her mother, Sada Kaur, were interested in him only in so far as he was useful to them in advancing the cause of the Kanhayas. Sada Kaur, in fact, took no care to hide that all her scheming and plotting were aimed at this. Whatever may have been the barriers on either side, neither party did anything to overcome them. The result was that the marriage proved an unhappy one. Tension increased to such an extent that, in 1798, Ranjit Singh took a second wife, namely Raj Kaur, sister of the Nakkai sardar. She was renamed Datar Kaur, was affectionately spoken of as Mai Nakkain and remained his most respected queen.

Soon after Ranjit Singh's second marriage, Dewan Lakhpat Rai was murdered while out collecting rent, and Ranjit Singh took the management of his estate into his own hands. This proved too much for Sada Kaur and, taking Mehtab Kaur with her, she went back to her own misl.



Maharani Mehtab Kaur

CHAPTER III

Leader Of The Sikhs

When the youthful chief, after settling his domestic affairs, surveyed the scene outside his home and estate, what he saw made him think. One thing that was clear was that the Sikhs had a hard time ahead of them. The misl organization, which had been built up into a united fraternity on foundations laid by the Khalsa warriors of Guru Gobind Singh, was disintegrating into a collection of chiefdoms warring or working against each other. Sahib Singh Phulkia of Patiala had even gone to the length of offering his help to Ahmad Shah Abdali's grandson, Shah Zaman, in re-establishing Afghan dominion over northern India. Shah Zaman could also count upon the help of two other powerful chiefs — Nizamuddin Khan, the Pathan ruler of Kasur, and Sansar Chand, the Rajput ruler of Kangra. Nizamuddin owed both a racial and a religious loyalty to the Afghan king and viewed the rise of the Sikh misls around him with misgivings. Sansar Chand had ambitious designs of extending his kingdom from the mountainous regions to the plains over the territories of his Sikh neighbours. Another internal menace to the Sikhs was the English adventurer, George Thomas, who had carved out a kingdom for himself, with his capital at Hansi. Not content with frequent forays into the domains of the Sikh chiefs of Patiala and Jind, he had designs of planting the Union Jack on the banks of the river Indus. Still another source of danger was

the Gurkha chief, Amar Singh Thapa, who had advanced his frontier right up to Sansar Chand's kingdom and might join hands with the latter against the Sikhs.

There were two other powers, more formidable than the above, to be reckoned with — the Marhattas and the English. The Marhattas held the Mughal Emperor at Delhi in subservience and were firmly established in southern Punjab, with Meerut as their headquarters. It was a common boast of their French generals that they would extend the Marhatta empire right across the Punjab to the Khyber Pass. The English, who ruled eastern India, had extended their protection up to the southern bank of the river Sutlej. Nobody could anticipate what they would do next.

The long-apprehended Afghan invasion took place towards the end of 1796. Shah Zaman marched into India at the head of 30,000 men. He expected help not only from Nizamuddin of Kasur and Sahib Singh of Patiala, but also from the Rohilla Afghans and the Nawab Wazir of Oudh. The Mughal Emperor did not matter. The English, it was hoped, would be sensible enough to remain aloof. As regards the Marhattas, they could be dealt with after the Sikhs had been disposed of.

The important Sikh misls at the time, besides the Sukerchakias (and the Phulkias, who were on the enemy's side), were the Kanhayas, the Nakkais, the Ahluwalias and the Bhangis. Ranjit Singh already had matrimonial ties with the Kanhayas and the Nakkais. As regards the Ahluwalias, Ranjit Singh hoped that their Chief, Fateh Singh, would stand by him in defending the Punjab. He could not, however, rely upon the Bhangis to do so and prepared himself to deal with them separately.

Minor misldars along the route of the Afghan advance fled before it to the safety of the hills. Soon the Afghans reached Gujrat. Sahib Singh Bhangi made good his escape after a nominal resistance. The next misl on the line of advance was that of Ranjit Singh. He had hardly 5,000 ill-disciplined horsemen, armed with only muskets and spears, as against the 30,000 strong Afghan army equipped with heavy artillery and swivel guns mounted on camels. It would be suicidal for him to face the Afghans at Gujranwala. So he withdrew to Amritsar with the idea of mustering there the forces of the various misls which could be counted upon and making a united stand. Many Sikh chiefs assembled at Amritsar in answer to his summons in the name of the Sarbat Khalsa, that is, the Sikh community as a whole. The majority, however, were for withdrawing to the hills and then recovering the property looted by the Afghans by attacking them at different points on their return journey. As Ranjit Singh had anticipated, the principal advocate of this policy was Sahib Singh Bhangi. The situation was saved by Sada Kaur joining Ranjit Singh in an appeal for a bold stand with all the assembled forces of the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh was chosen to command the defending army and he marched with it towards Lahore. He soon cleared the countryside of all Afghans and their collaborators and then surrounded Lahore. The defences of Lahore were, however, too strong for him to break through. The siege might have dragged on indefinitely, had not Shah Zaman been called back to Afghanistan by news of a threatened rebellion on the part of his brother Mahmud. The Sikhs relieved him of much of his loot by hit-and-run tactics and followed this up by inflicting a defeat on his general, Shahanachi Bashi, who had come from Lahore to punish them and recover the loot.

The Punjab was to experience yet another Afghan invasion. Shah Zaman came back a year later. A meeting of the

Sarbat Khalsa was again held at Amritsar and Ranjit Singh was again chosen to lead the Sikh forces. Shah Zaman, after another triumphal entry into Lahore, sent a detachment to deal with them at Amritsar. The Afghans were defeated and retired to Lahore, with Ranjit Singh hard at their heels. There followed a siege of Lahore by Ranjit Singh. It was in the course of this siege that Ranjit Singh rode up to Samman Burj in Lahore Fort and, standing below it, challenged Shah Zaman to single combat. The Shah did not condescend to accept the challenge, nor did his army show any inclination to come out and fight. Therefore, Ranjit Singh cut off the supply lines of the Afghans so that they were forced to come out and take the offensive. Although they were joined by Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur, they were repulsed with heavy losses, and the siege continued. It was not lifted until Shah Zaman, after having tried in vain to win over some of the Sikh chiefs through his agents, promised to return to Kabul. While the other chiefs broke camp and hurried back to their homes, Ranjit Singh pursued the Afghan army and gave it a running fight all the way from Gujranwala to the banks of the river Jhelum. Ranjit Singh was now the acknowledged leader of the Sikhs. Since the time of the Gurus there had been only one man who had enjoyed this position before him, namely, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

CHAPTER IV

From Misldar To Maharaja of the Punjab

For three years after the departure of the Afghans, Lahore was misruled by three Sikh chieftains, Chet Singh, Sahib Singh and Mohr Singh, whose fathers had wrested it from the Afghans in 1764. Tired of the misrule, the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh citizens sent a joint deputation to Ranjit Singh and invited him to take over the city, promising him all help. Ranjit Singh sent one of his trusted Muslim officers to Lahore with the deputation in order to ascertain the genuineness of the invitation and the prospects of success. When the officer came back and reported that the coast was clear, Ranjit Singh went to Batala and consulted Sada Kaur. She was all for accepting the invitation.

The operation, which took place during the night following the tenth day of Muharram in 1799, was a masterpiece of strategy. While the whole population of Lahore was out in the streets taking part in, or watching the celebrations during the day, Ranjit Singh's army was quietly approaching Lahore. It halted at a convenient distance from the city and waited for the shades of night to descend. During the night, while the celebrations were still going on, it took up positions round the city wall. On the following day it was only a question of blowing a few breaches in the wall and marching in. It took Ranjit Singh one more day to complete the occupation and

become master of Lahore. Everything had been done practically without a shot having been fired. Ranjit Singh dealt leniently with his adversaries. Sahib Singh was away. His family and retainers were allowed to escape. So were Mohr Singh and his family and retainers. Chet Singh shut himself up in Lahore Fort for a day. When he came out, after having been starved into submission, Ranjit Singh embraced him and made him a generous grant for his lifetime.

Lahore was the biggest city of the Punjab and for the Sikhs second in importance only to Amritsar as the birthplace of their fourth Guru, Ram Das. Besides, it had always been the capital of the province. Its capture, therefore, not only added much to Ranjit Singh's strength and importance, but also invested him with the semblance of a title to the rest of the Punjab. The envy caused by this drove some of his former allies to join hands with the Bhangis and Nizamuddin of Kasur in an attempt to dislodge him from Lahore. The attempt failed when Ranjit Singh met them at the village of Bhasin, ten miles east of Lahore, and dispersed their forces. Ranjit Singh decided to prevent his adversaries from again uniting up against him. He began by reducing to submission the Raja of Jammu, who had collaborated with the Afghans, and then took action against Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat, who was plotting with the Chief of Akalgarh to attack Gujranwala.

Learning of this conflict, Shah Zaman sent emissaries to the rival factions. Ranjit Singh received the emissaries sent to him with great ceremony, accepted the gifts they were carrying for him and sent them back with more precious gifts, thus forestalling his rivals' designs of persuading Shah Zaman to proceed against him. Among the gifts he sent were some pieces of artillery which the Shah had lost in the river Chenab during his retreat and which he had salvaged. The friendship which this exchange of gifts betokened caused some

concern to the English, who looked upon Shah Zaman's ambitious designs on India as a danger to their own rising power. Earlier, when Shah Zaman's first invasion was impending, they had played a part behind the scenes in persuading the Sikh chiefs to accept Ranjit Singh's leadership, as they had seen the only hope of Sikh resistance in him. The new development meant that even this hope was gone. They sent an agent, Mir Yusuf Ali, to the Sikh chiefs. Getting no response from the Malwa chiefs south of the Sutlej, he proceeded to Amritsar and called on Sada Kaur, who sent for Ranjit Singh. It was risky for Ranjit Singh to go to Amritsar, because it was in Bhangi hands; but he took the risk. The meeting between Ranjit Singh, Sada Kaur and Yusuf Ali did not prove very fruitful. The danger of a further Afghan invasion was, however, soon afterwards averted by a civil war in Kabul.

The time was now ripe for Ranjit Singh to assume the formal title of Maharaja of the Punjab. The title seemed appropriate, since he was acknowledged by the majority of the chiefs as their leader and was already master of the larger part of the Punjab. It would give a concrete shape to the concept of a single Sikh fraternity welding together the numerous independent misls, which had outlived their day. Lastly, it would knit together the various religious and racial communities of the Punjab into a nation headed for the first time in history by an independent Punjabi ruler. Ranjit Singh had hesitated to assume the title earlier for fear of aggravating the jealousy of the other chiefs. At last on April 12, 1801, a grand Durbar was held and Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, a direct descendant of Guru Nanak, daubed him with saffron paste and proclaimed him Maharaja of the Punjab.

There were, however, still some chiefs who refused to acknowledge Ranjit Singh's sovereignty. The most defiant

of these were Nizamuddin of Kasur and Sansar Chand of Kangra. Expeditions were undertaken against both of them. They both paid an indemnity, agreed to pay tribute and ceded some territory. Then, after exchanging turbans with Fateh Singh Ahluwalia at Taran Taaran, Ranjit Singh with his help subdued the Muslim landowners of Pindi Bhattian, from whom he received a tribute of four hundred horses. Next to be dealt with was Jassa Singh Dooloo, who had collaborated with the Bhangis against Ranjit Singh. He surrendered after a long siege and was taken into the Maharaja's service for his brave defence. Meanwhile, Nizamuddin made another bid for independence. He was again defeated and again pardoned. A more difficult problem than all these was presented by Multan, whose Muslim ruler had all along professed loyalty to Afghanistan and remained aloof from the emergent movement for a national state of the Punjab. Besides, it had a strong fort. Against the advice of all his sardars, Ranjit Singh took the road to Multan and, fighting his way through Muslim tribes roused by Nawab Muzaffar Khan, the Multan chief, appeared before the city. Weighing the chances of the mud walls of his fort against the Sikh artillery, Muzaffar Khan paid an indemnity and acknowledged Ranjit Singh's suzerainty. This completed one series of Ranjit Singh's successes in reducing the Punjab chiefs to submission.

Another series began in 1802 with the capture of Amritsar, which was as clever a piece of strategy as the taking of Lahore had been. The invitation in this case came from the Hindu merchants of Amritsar, who were groaning under the ever-increasing burden of exactions by the dozen or so Sikh families owning the city. The combined forces of Ranjit Singh, Sada Kaur and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia marched upon the city and surrounded it. They took it piecemeal without much fighting. The only resistance offered — a brave one — came from Mai Sukhan, widow of Gulab Singh Bhangi. Ranjit Singh gave

her and her minor son a handsome pension. Amritsar was not only the sacred city of the Sikhs, but also the second largest after Lahore and the most important commercial centre in the Punjab. Its capture considerably enhanced Ranjit Singh's power and prestige. The next campaign was against Jhang, ruled by the Sial chief, Nawab Ahmed Khan, who had refused to pay tribute to Ranjit Singh. After facing a siege which lasted three days, Ahmed Khan escaped to Multan. A few months later, he made his submission and was re-instated. A tribute-collecting tour of the Muslim districts between the Indus and the Chenab and a threatened second attack upon Multan, which was averted by the Nawab's payment of a ransom, rounded off this series of successful expeditions.

Ranjit Singh was now master of the Punjab north of the Sutlej. The independent chiefdoms and principalities of that part of the Punjab, Sikh, Muslim and Hindu, including the Sukerchakia misl, were now no more. They had become integral parts of a commonwealth ruled by the most capable of them.

Chapter V

Rival and Ally of the English

While Ranjit Singh was busy consolidating his rule over the territories north of the Sutlej, events were taking a new turn across the river. The English had clashed with the Marhattas and inflicted a series of decisive defeats on them. They had first taken over Delhi and Agra and possession of the Mughal Emperor's person from Scindia and then driven out the remaining Marhatta chief, Jaswant Rao Holkar. The Marhatta dream of an Indian empire had thus vanished into thin air. Scindia's French general, Perron, who had eliminated the English adventurer, George Thomas, had in his turn strutted across the stage and made his bow off it.

Holkar and his Rohilla ally, Amir Khan, after trying in vain to get help from the chiefs of Malwa, came to Amritsar to meet Ranjit Singh and, learning that he was in Multan, sent emissaries to him there. So did the English commander, Lord Lake, who had been pursuing Holkar and was at that time encamped near the Beas. Ranjit Singh convened a meeting of all his principal sardars at Amritsar. While Holkar appealed to Ranjit Singh for help in driving the British back, Lord Lake made it known that this would involve the extension of Anglo-Marhatta hostilities to his domains. Ranjit Singh could ill-afford to make the Punjab a theatre of war, since his own position had not yet been consolidated. Therefore, after an incognito visit to Lord Lake, he offered to

mediate between the English and the Marhattas. Under the settlement reached through his mediation Holkar was allowed to resume his possessions and recrossed the Sutlej, never to return. A treaty, called the Treaty of Lahore, was signed on January 1, 1806 between Ranjit Singh and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia on one side and the English on the other. The Sikh signatories guaranteed that Holkar's army would depart and undertook to have nothing to do with him. The English, for their part, promised to keep away from their territories.

Then, after a brief respite necessitated by illness, Ranjit Singh spent two strenuous years of ceaseless touring and campaigning. On his way to Patiala to settle a dispute between the chiefs of Patiala and Nabha, which threatened to engulf the whole of south-eastern Punjab, he received tribute from the Faizullapuria misl, the Dullewalia misl, the Sodhis of Kartarpur and the town of Ludhiana and Jagraon. He settled the dispute by giving some territories to the aggrieved party, namely, the chief of Patiala. The Malwa chiefs assembled at Patiala, made their obeisance to him and acknowledged him as the Maharaja of all the Punjab. On his way back to Lahore he helped his former enemy, Sansar Chand of Kangra, in driving away Amar Singh Thapa, who had besieged the city. Soon after his return to Lahore, he was called upon to lead one more expedition against Kasur, where Kutbuddin Khan, who had succeeded his dead brother, Nizamuddin Khan, was preparing to launch a war with the covert help of Muzaffar Khan of Multan. After a month-long siege, Kutbuddin's fort was breached and captured. Kutbuddin, who was arrested while trying to escape, was not only pardoned, but given a respectable jagir across the Sutlej at Mamdot. For his part in helping Kutbuddin, Muzaffar Khan got off with a small cash penalty of Rs. 20,000/-, which he paid after a futile attempt to enlist

his Muslim neighbour's help in stopping the entry of the Durbar troops into Multan.

It became necessary for Ranjit Singh to visit Patiala once again — this time at the invitation of Sahib Singh's wife, Aas Kaur, to settle a dispute between her and her husband. The matter was difficult, for the Rani wanted her son, Karam Singh, to be installed as chief in her husband's lifetime. Ranjit Singh ruled that Sahib Singh should continue and Karam Singh be given a jagir of Rs. 50,000/- a year. On his return journey Ranjit Singh received tribute from the Sirhind chiefs and captured Naraingarh, Morinda, Rahon, Nowshera, Bahlolpur, Bharatgarh, Pathankote, Jasrota, Chamba and Basohli.

On his return to Lahore he held a Durbar. While those chiefs who attended the Durbar were invested with robes of honour and confirmed in their possessions, those who did not were proceeded against. Prominent among the latter were the chiefs of Sialkot, Gujrat and Akhnur. The campaign closed with the capture of Sheikhupura, which was of major importance as a fort.

Ranjit Singh was now the unchallenged ruler of the whole of the Punjab except for six misls between the Sutlej and the Jumna. Even the chiefs of these misls had, in fact, acknowledged his suzerainty on the two occasions when he had visited Patiala, and the English had pretended not to have noticed this. It only remained to secure their legal recognition of what was already a fact. There was, however, one snag: during the negotiations about Holkar, Ranjit Singh had suggested to Lord Lake that the Sutlej be regarded as the boundary between the English and himself. The English, for their part, had not then taken any notice of the suggestion. But the situation had since changed radically. Napoleon

Bonaparte and Tsar Alexander had signed the anti-British Treaty of Tilsit, which might give the Russians an excuse for invading the English possessions in India by the land route through Afghanistan, Persia, Sind and the Punjab. Fixation of the Sutlej rather than the Jumna as the boundary between themselves and Ranjit Singh thus acquired for the English an importance which it had never had before. The more forward their frontier the better arrangements they could make for the defence of their territory. What added to the importance of the matter was the proposed grand strategy of erecting defensive dams in Afghanistan, Persia, Sind and the Punjab. The English, therefore, decided to sound Ranjit Singh. They began in a cautious manner. Ranjit Singh was to visit Hardwar to bathe in the Ganges. The English deputed Metcalfe to receive him on the southern bank of the Jumna and also escort him upto there on his return journey. The idea was to convey to him that they regarded the Jumna as their northern frontier. Ranjit Singh's visit to Hardwar, however, did not take place and Metcalfe proceeded to the Punjab to meet him.

For some time past the Malwa chiefs, under the leadership of the chiefs of Patiala and Jind, had been having second thoughts about their acceptance of Ranjit Singh's sovereignty. They sent a deputation to wait upon the English Resident, Seton, with a memorandum seeking protection from Ranjit Singh. Although the Governor-General, to whom the memorandum was forwarded, declined to receive the deputation, Ranjit Singh had a shrewd suspicion that it had been engineered by English agents and that the English were keeping it up their sleeves. He invited the Malwa chiefs to Amritsar and assured them that, contrary to what the English agents might have been telling them, he had no designs of expropriating them. The chiefs in return gave assurances of their loyalty to him.

Metcalfe, on his way to the Punjab to meet Ranjit Singh, was received on the Maharaja's behalf by Fakir Imamuddin at Patiala. This place was chosen with the intention of making it known to Metcalfe that he was in the Maharaja's domain. Besides, some of the Malwa chiefs whom Metcalfe would expect to be there to receive him were summoned away to Lahore. Metcalfe met the others and heard their representations against Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh received Metcalfe at Khemkaran near Kasur, on September 11, 1808. But when, after their first meeting, which was devoted to the usual banalities, Metcalfe received a delegation of Malwa chiefs, Ranjit Singh had it politely communicated to the English envoy that he had been called away by more important business elsewhere and would be pleased if the envoy would convey his friendly greetings to the Governor-General. Metcalfe, however, stuck to his post and called on Ranjit Singh three days later. This meeting served to restore "good humour". Business started three days later still — in full Durbar. Metcalfe read out a statement to the effect that, according to his Government's information, the French, whose influence had already infiltrated into Persia, had designs on Afghanistan and the Punjab as well as the English possessions in India. In view of this he appealed for a united defence on the part of the powers affected — Afghanistan, the Punjab and the English. Ranjit Singh had from the first suspected that the Franco-Russian invasion was only a bogey invented by the English to alarm him into granting them a foothold, first in the Malwa states and then in his own kingdom. Metcalfe's answers to the questions put to him by the Maharaja and his advisers did nothing to dispel this suspicion.

On the following day, the Maharaja's advisers, headed by Fakir Azizuddin, called on Metcalfe. Going beyond the

English proposal for joint defence, they mooted a full union between the English and Ranjit Singh as sovereign of all the Sikhs. Metcalfe tried to hedge this proposal on the excuse that discussion of it exceeded his mandate, which was confined to questions of mutual interest. When Fakir Azizuddin pointed out that agreement on a common boundary was as much a question of mutual interest as a defensive alliance, Metcalfe replied vaguely that his Government had no intention of exceeding its boundary, which was already firmly fixed. Pressed by Azizuddin to state where exactly this fixed boundary was, Metcalfe mentioned Karnal. Now, Karnal happened to be in the estate of Gurdit Singh, an old friend of Ranjit Singh. When this was pointed out to Metcalfe, he had no explanation to offer.

The Maharaja received Metcalfe again on the following day and asked for a clear statement of English policy about the states south of the Sutlej. Metcalfe replied with an oblique reference to his Government's moderation in not extending their territories beyond the Jumna, and threw in a hint that it would not pay the Maharaja to insist on a formal declaration of policy. That, he threatened, might result in the Governor-General declaring the Sutlej to be the common boundary. The parleys ended abruptly with the departure of Ranjit Singh on a third expedition across the Sutlej. He left Fakir Azizuddin to follow him along with the British envoy, if the latter cared to continue the parleys.

Metcalfe again met Ranjit Singh at Khai, with no more conclusive results. Then he followed the Maharaja to Faridkot, where he arrived the day after the city, whose chief had revolted against the Durbar, had been captured. The parleys were resumed at Faridkot and the parties for the first time got down to business. Metcalfe presented a draft agreement containing three clauses, which provided for joint defence

against a possible French invasion, passage for English troops through the Punjab up to its northern frontier and an intelligence post for operations beyond the Indus. Three days later the Maharaja's representatives produced a draft containing counter-proposals. These stipulated most-favoured-nation treatment to the Punjab Durbar, recognition of Ranjit Singh's suzerainty over the whole Sikh nation, non-intervention in the internal affairs of the Sikhs and an alliance in perpetuity. The immediate outcome was a stalemate; the two sets of proposals spoke of altogether different things.

To drive it further home to Metcalfe that he meant business when he talked of his sovereignty, Ranjit Singh proceeded after a fortnight to Malerkotla, where he levied an indemnity on the Pathan chief, Ataullah Khan, in full view of Metcalfe. A further meeting at Fatehgarh-Gongran, whither Metcalfe followed Ranjit Singh, convinced the former that Ranjit Singh's suzerainty over the Malwa chiefs was a *fait accompli*, which could not be brushed aside or whisked away. Ranjit Singh, for his part, proceeded on his prestige-building and tribute-collecting tour through the region, visiting Ambala, Saniwal, Chandpur, Jhandar, Dhari, Bahrampur, Rahimabad, Machiwara, Kauna, Trukot, Challandi and Kailowar, all towns of different sizes. Wherever he went he was welcomed. Proceeding next to Shahabad, he sent word to Sahib Singh of Patiala that he wished to see him.

Sahib Singh had reason to avoid facing Ranjit Singh, but after some hesitation agreed to meet him at Lakhnaur, 20 miles east of Patiala, in the tent of the universally revered Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. Ranjit Singh embraced him warmly and exchanged turbans with him. On the following day, he signed a treaty of friendship with Sahib Singh and recrossed the Sutlej with Bhag Singh of Jind, Lal Singh of Kaithal and

other chiefs of Malwa states in his train, reaching Amritsar by forced marches.

Meanwhile, the British Government had decided to make good the threat held out to Ranjit Singh by Metcalfe — that they would declare the Sutlej to be their northern boundary. Soon after the Maharaja's return to Amritsar, Metcalfe arrived with an ultimatum asking him to restore all states that he had taken from the Malwa chiefs, to stop levying tribute on them and to confine his army to the left bank of the Sutlej. The reason advanced was that the English had acquired suzerainty over the territory by replacing the Marhattas as the paramount power in the north of Hindustan. They had been too liberal to levy tribute; but that did not mean that another power could levy it. The instructions given to Metcalfe were that he should spin out the negotiations and play for time until the English forces that were being sent under Colonel Ochterlony to the Punjab frontier were ready for action. He, therefore, timed the delivery of the Governor-General's letter to coincide with the Diwali festival. When the letter was read out and interpreted to Ranjit Singh, he took it with perfect calm. He did not at first believe that it was meant seriously. When, however, a note from Metcalfe confirmed its contents, he decided to return to Lahore.

Metcalfe followed him to Lahore after spending some more time at Amritsar. After some deliberate vacillation he asked for a meeting. He was received in full durbar. Fakir Azizuddin presented the Durbar's case. He reiterated the history of the relations between Ranjit Singh and the English and stressed the point that the British Government had all along acquiesced in the Maharaja's exercising suzerainty over the Malwa chiefs. As regards the estates taken over by the Durbar, he maintained that they amounted to settled conquests. Metcalfe, who was still playing for time, contented

himself with arguing around the case. On the following day, receiving news of satisfactory military preparations by the English, he announced that an English force was marching up to the Sutlej. The ultimatum was now more than the bluff that Ranjit Singh had originally thought it to be.

There were two schools of thought in the Durbar. The Maharaja himself was for fighting it out. He recalled his most pugnacious general, Dewan Mohkam Chand, from Kangra and posted him at Phillaur on the Sutlej, opposite to Ludhiana. Orders were sent to all the sardars to come up with their troops and nearly 100,000 men came from all quarters. The new fort of Gobindgarh at Amritsar was strengthened and stocked with ammunition and provisions against a long siege. Fakir Azizuddin led the opposite school. He counselled patience and further negotiation; and even Sada Kaur, who had always been for a bold policy in the past, supported him. Ranjit Singh decided to wait and watch for some time; but declared that if Ochterlony crossed the Sutlej, he would go to war.

A fortnight after the delivery of the ultimatum, Ochterlony crossed the Jumna and advanced by way of Buria, Patiala and Nabha towards Ludhiana. The Malwa chiefs, always backers of the winning horse, greeted him, as they had previously greeted Ranjit Singh. Sada Kaur, either playing for safety or playing a double game, also mounted the bandwagon. Meanwhile the agents of the Malwa sardars at Lahore went on paying lip service to Ranjit Singh. After another fortnight, Metcalfe, who was informed by Ranjit Singh that the Durbar troops had been ordered to evacuate Ambala, demanded that they should also evacuate Faridkot and Saniwal. To settle this and some allied questions, negotiations were resumed at Amritsar. Metcalfe had, in the meantime, gone further than his original mission and recommended

to his Government a full-scale invasion of the Punjab to put an end to Ranjit Singh's rule. He had been instructed to prolong the negotiations further still so as to give the English time to launch the bigger campaign now proposed by him. At this juncture, fate intervened and staged an anti-climax. Napoleon attacked Spain and it was thought that he would be too busy there to pursue his Indian plans. The immediate necessity for a war with Ranjit Singh ceased to exist. On Ranjit Singh's side, too, an incident occurred which was of as much importance for his kingdom as Napoleon's invasion of Spain was for the world as a whole. Holi and Muharram coincided and an armed clash took place between the Nihang Sikhs and the Muslims in Metcalfe's escort in front of the Golden Temple. This was a great blow to Ranjit Singh's constant efforts at maintaining communal harmony among his subjects, which was the mainstay of his rule. It saddened him and morally weakened his negotiating and fighting power. Metcalfe tried to make capital out of the incident by blaming it on Ranjit Singh himself. But his representations to the British Government in India to use it as a pretext for invading the Punjab crossed two drafts of treaties despatched from Calcutta.

The Treaty of Amritsar, which was signed on April 25, 1809, provided for perpetual friendship between the two powers, according to most-favoured-nation treatment to the Durbar, recognition of the Maharaja's sovereignty over territories north of the Sutlej and maintenance by the Maharaja of no more troops on the north bank of the Sutlej than were necessary for policing his estates on that bank. These provisions implied that Ranjit Singh renounced all claim to sovereignty over states south of the Sutlej; but there was a private understanding that he did not have to cede what Fakir Azizuddin, during his negotiations with Metcalfe, had described as "settled conquests."

The Secret Committee of the East India Company's Board of Directors, when reviewing the Treaty of Amritsar euphemistically remarked that it constituted a departure from the policy laid down in October, 1809. It was in fact a complete *volte face*. Dewan Mohkam Chand went further and called it a piece of treachery and an insult. To vindicate the Durbar's honour, he contacted the Marhattas and the Rohillas for an alliance to throw the British out. But Ranjit Singh, listening to the wiser counsels of Azizuddin, took the whole thing philosophically and sportingly. He had played a political game of chess and lost it to an opponent cleverer than himself, and that was the end of the matter. There were better things for him to do than chasing a shadow, even if the shadow was a big chunk of the Indian empire.

Chapter VI

Host to Afghan Ex-Kings

Dammed on his south-eastern frontier, Ranjit Singh's irrepressible energy soon found an outlet elsewhere. Sansar Chand of Kangra was again under pressure from Amar Singh Thapa, whose troops were threatening his fort. After failing to enlist British support, he appealed to Ranjit Singh through his brother, Fateh Chand. Ranjit Singh promised help on the condition precedent that Kangra fort should be delivered to the Durbar troops, who would then defend it as a part of his domain. But when Ranjit Singh arrived at the fort, he found it already closely besieged by the Gurkhas. It took three months to starve the Gurkhas into retreating by cutting off their supply lines with Nepal and stopping the sale of provisions to them by the local hill people. When, at this juncture, Ranjit Singh demanded possession of the fort, Sansar Chand became evasive. He had already been in touch with Amar Singh Thapa and had offered to let him have the fort if he and his family were permitted to withdraw in safety. It was not until Ranjit Singh had made a prisoner of his son, who was held by him as a hostage, that Sansar Chand surrendered the fort. The retreating Gurkhas were compelled to put up a fight and, although they were defeated, they fought so hard that, after the action was over, Ranjit Singh in appreciation of their bravery gave them time to

retire in order and even helped them in collecting their equipment.

Back home from this victory, Ranjit Singh addressed himself to the task of reducing the pockets of resistance and independence still existing in his territories. He himself captured Hariana, Islamgarh, Jalalpur, Khushab, Sahiwal and Kusk. Dewan Mohkam Chand took possession of the Faizullapuria misl's estate with the principal town, Jullundur. Dewan Bhawani Dass annexed Jammu. Fakir Azizuddin captured Gujrat. Desa Singh Majithia annexed the hill states of Mandi and Suket. Mian Ghausa took Patti and other villages near Taran Taaran. Even the Nakkais and the Kanhayas, despite their relationship to the Maharaja, had to surrender some territories, for the Durbar was no respecter of persons where the question of submission to its authority was concerned.

While Ranjit Singh was at Khushab in February, 1820 he received an unexpected visitor from Afghanistan. This was Shah Shuja, brother of Shah Zaman. In the decade since Shah Zaman had finally withdrawn from the Punjab, leaving the field clear for Ranjit Singh to establish his kingdom, Afghanistan had been the scene of civil wars and the cockpit of revolutions. Power had passed from the royal family, which belonged to the Saddozai clan, into the hands of the Barakzai clan, headed by Wazir Fateh Khan. Fateh Khan had begun by dethroning Zaman and installing his half-brother, Mahmud, who had put out Zaman's eyes and imprisoned him. Mahmud in his turn had been ousted by another half-brother, Shuja, but had been reinstalled by the Barakzais. Shuja was now in the Punjab with the object of exploring the prospects of raising help in regaining his throne. He was received by Ranjit Singh with all due ceremony. There was some talk about co-operation in the recovery of

Multan and Peshawar for Shuja and their eventual transfer to Ranjit Singh as the price of his help in Shuja's recovery of his throne. No formal arrangement was, however, reached as Shuja was in a hurry to proceed to Rawalpindi, where Zaman had gone ahead of him, and had also received messages of loyalty from the Yusufzais and other tribes in the Peshawar region. Shuja had more than once tried to re-establish his authority over Multan and had personally proceeded to the city. He had been barely received with courtesy and had not even been given admittance. As regards Kashmir, his position was still more uncertain there with a Governor whose loyalties were at best unknown.

Ranjit Singh addressed himself first to Multan. It did not take the Durbar troops long to occupy the city: they had done so before. But the fort proved a hard nut to crack, even for the Zam Zama, which Ranjit Singh had acquired from the Bhangis and which discharged a ball of eighty Lbs. A three-month long siege ended with the payment of a tribute by Nawab Muzaffar Khan. The old story had been repeated. Then, after a series of successful operations against various Sikh and Muslim chiefs and the hill Rajas of Bhimbar and Rajauri, Ranjit Singh reached the salt mines of Khewra between the Jhelum and the Indus. While there — it was now February, 1811 — he received news of the arrival of another visitor from Afghanistan — this time the reigning king himself at the head of twelve thousand men. It was Shah Mahmud on an avowed punitive mission against Ata Muhammad, the Governor of Kashmir, and Jahan Dad Khan, the Governor of Attock, who were suspected of having aided Shuja in an attack on Peshawar. After Fakir Azizuddin had called on the Shah and ascertained his intentions, a meeting between the two rulers took place at Rawalpindi. Ranjit Singh had made preparations to resist Shah Mahmud's advance; but

the meeting ended happily in the Shah's voluntary withdrawal after an exchange of gifts.

There had been a see-saw of fortunes during the interval between Ranjit Singh's meeting with Shah Shuja a year earlier and his present meeting with Shah Mahmud. Shuja had assembled an army from among the tribes in and around Peshawar and, with the covert help of the Governor of Kashmir and perhaps also the Governor of Attock, had repulsed Mahmud, who had then, ironically enough, taken refuge in the fort of Attock. But Shuja had enjoyed his nominal restoration to the throne of Kabul only for four brief months. Thereafter Wazir Fateh Khan's brothers had inflicted a crushing defeat on him and again driven him into the wilderness. He had, by another ironical turn of events, taken asylum in the fort of Attock like his rival. From there he had gone to Kashmir at the invitation of Ata Muhammad. But at the time of the meeting between Ranjit Singh and Mahmud he was a prisoner in the custody of Ata Muhammad, while Mahmud was back on the throne of Kabul. If any fixed pattern could be seen in these kaleidoscopic changes, it was this that Ata Muhammad and Jahan Dad Khan, who were brothers, were trying to become independent of Kabul by playing the contestants for the throne against each other. Shah Shuja had written to Ranjit Singh for advice before he left Attock for Kashmir, but Ranjit Singh had replied that he should use his own discretion. Again, before proceeding to Kashmir, he had requested Ranjit Singh to transfer his family to Lahore, where, he felt, they would be safer than in Rawalpindi. Shah Zaman and the families of both the brothers had accordingly been provided with a house in Lahore. They had been escorted in royal style and Ranjit Singh had personally received them at the house.

Before Shah Shuja's going to Kashmir, Wazir Fateh Khan had sent emissaries to Ranjit Singh to sound him about help

in an invasion of Kashmir. Ranjit Singh had put them off with vague promises, saying that he would let the Wazir know his decision after the wedding of Prince Kharak Singh, which was then impending. During the wedding Ranjit Singh took the opportunity of sounding Colonel Ochterlony, who was representing the Governor-General, and found that the British would not oppose an expedition by him against Kashmir any more than they would support it. The matter had now assumed a dual aspect. It was not merely a question of capturing Kashmir, but also of delivering Shah Shuja from imprisonment. Soon after the wedding was over, Wazir Fateh Khan's emissaries came again with an offer of half the loot and nine lakhs of rupees for his help in capturing Kashmir. Zaman and Shuja's senior wife, Wafa Begum, made an alternative offer for Shuja's reunion with them — the gift of the most precious diamond in the world, the Koh-i-Noor. Both offers were good, and the undertakings did not clash with each other. So he accepted the offers and agreed to the undertakings.

Ranjit Singh and Wazir Fateh Khan met in December, 1812, at Rohtas on the western bank of the Jhelum. Ranjit Singh proposed that the two armies should proceed by the Mirpur and Rajauri route instead of the Muzaffarabad route, as the latter, he thought, must be under snow at that time. This was agreed upon. Dewan Mohkam Chand and Sardar Dal Singh were put in command of the Durbar forces and Ranjit Singh gave them strict instructions that Shah Shuja must be liberated and secured at any cost. The combined forces crossed the Jhelum and proceeded to Pir Panjal via Bhimbar and Rajauri. There was a heavy fall of snow at Pir Panjal. Wazir Fateh Khan, confident of the superior ability of his troops to march over snow-covered hilly country, pressed forward by double marches without consulting or even informing Dewan Mohkam Chand. If he arrived earlier at Shergarh, where

Shuja was imprisoned, there was no knowing what he would do to the latter. Fortunately, the promise of a jagir induced the chief of Rajauri to point out a shorter route, which enabled the Durbar forces to reach Shergarh in time to join the Afghans in the siege of the fort. Ata Muhammad Khan, the Governor, caught between two fires, first went through the motions of installing Shuja as king and then began to negotiate with Wazir Fateh Khan. The problem was solved for him by Shuja himself walking over to the Sikh camp. Fateh Khan demanded his delivery to himself and even threatened to use force; but Dewan Mohkam Chand, strengthened by Shuja's own choice, held on to him. His preoccupation with this, however, gave the Afghans an opportunity of capturing Shergarh, Hari Parbat and the strongholds of the valley for themselves and helping themselves exclusively to the loot. When Dewan Mohkam Chand demanded the Durbar's stipulated share of the loot and payment of the first nine lakh rupees per annum, Fateh Khan turned round and said that the Durbar troops had done nothing to deserve any reward. While this wrangle was going on, Ata Muhammad took the opportunity to escape.

On receiving information of this state of affairs from Mohkam Chand, Ranjit Singh ordered the seizure of Attock fort as a counter-measure. Jahan Dad Khan, the Governor, weakened by the defeat and flight of his brother, Ata Muhammad, and more afraid of the vengeance of Wazir Fateh Khan than of an alliance with the Punjab Durbar, handed over the fort to Fakir Azizuddin. By the time the news of this event reached Shergarh, Dewan Mohkam Chand was safely on his way back to Lahore along with his royal charge. This was in March, 1813.

Ranjit Singh had fulfilled his part of the contract with Wafa Begum. Shah Shuja was back with his family, none

the worse for the misadventures in which he had involved himself by putting his trust in double-dealers. He was escorted with royal honours by Prince Kharak Singh and Bhaia Ram Singh from the tomb of Jahangir up to Mubarak Haveli, built by the father of Akbar's illustrious minister, Abul Fazl, which had been set apart for him. On the following day Bhaia Ram Singh went to Mubarak Haveli to enquire about the delivery of the Koh-i-Noor. He was put off. So a heavy guard was placed round Mubarak Haveli. A few days later two members of the Shah's personal staff came to the fort with the Shah's compliments and his regrets that there had been some misunderstanding, as the diamond had been pawned by the Shah with a moneylender in Kandahar before he came to the Punjab. This was an obvious lie; in any case, it did not fit in with Wafa Begum's offer, which clearly implied that the diamond was in her possession. Ignoring this story, Ranjit Singh sent an offer of three lakh rupees and a jagir of Rs. 50,000/- per annum for the family. The offer was accepted, but fifty days' time was prayed for and granted. On the expiry of the period (on 1st June, 1813) Fakir Azizuddin, Bhai Gurbaksh Singh and Jamadar Khushal Singh were deputed by the Maharaja to inquire of the Shah whether he was now ready to deliver the diamond. The Shah answered in the affirmative, but expressed the desire that the Maharaja should come in person to receive it. Accordingly, Ranjit Singh, accompanied by some of his leading ministers, rode up to Mubarak Haveli with a posse of horsemen. He was received with due honour and ceremony, and the giver and receiver sat down facing each other. After a little while, the Shah motioned to a servant to bring the diamond. The servant brought in a bundle and delivered it to the Shah. At this stage, the Shah made a ceremonial sign of respect with his knee, and all courtiers present stood up. Then the Shah unwrapped the bundle and, taking out the diamond, presented

it to the Maharaja. The episode closed with an exchange of presents and robes of honour, escorting of the Shah to his haremsarai by the Maharaja himself and the removal of the guard posted round Mubarak Haveli. Due allowance being made for the personal equation in the accounts of the various persons directly concerned with this transaction, it appears that the money and jagir promised to Shah Shuja were also given.

Instead of relying upon a friendship cemented by an agreement honoured on both sides — at a heavy cost to both the parties, for, if the Koh-i-Noor was extremely precious, the Durbar forces for their part had suffered serious losses in the Kashmir enterprise without any recompense — Shah Shuja soon afterwards opened negotiations with his arch-enemy, Wazir Fateh Khan. Two of his men were caught with letters addressed to the Wazir, inviting him to invade the Punjab. Grave as his offence was — he would have lost his head for it under most regimes, ancient or modern —, he was let off with a light enough punishment, the seizure of some more of his jewellery. The ex-king eventually left Ranjit Singh's protection: first his wives and then he himself secretly disappeared from Lahore to live at Ludhiana under British protection. Zaman and his family also went away, but in a more graceful manner.

Wazir Fateh Khan, as soon as he came down from Kashmir, blockaded Attock fort. A relief force was sent from Lahore under Dewan Mohkam Chand. After the opposing armies had sat facing each other for three months, Dewan Mohkam Chand compelled the Afghans to take the initiative by manoeuvring to place his men between them and the river, which was their only source of water. The engagement that followed (on July 13, 1813) was the first pitched battle between the Durbar troops and the Afghans, and it was won by the former

by dint of superior manoeuvring skill. Wazir Fateh Khan's brother, Dost Muhammad Khan, opened the battle with a brilliant cavalry charge; but Dewan Mohkam Chand, feigning a retreat, led the Afghans to believe prematurely that they had won the day. Thus, when the Afghans dispersed to plunder, Mohkam Chand returned to the attack and drove them back with considerable loss to them.

The victory at Attock was followed by a second campaign in Kashmir in 1814, which proved a costly failure. The campaign was undertaken against the advice of Dewan Mohkam Chand, who, to make matters worse, was prevented by illness from taking part in it. The base camp was at Rohtas, from where a force of 20,000 men proceeded towards Poonch under the personal command of the Maharaja, assisted by some of his best generals, and another of 30,000 men towards Baramulla and Shupaian under the command of Mohkam Chand's twenty-year-old grandson, Ram Dyal. The plan was a pincer movement. It was the wrong time of year for a military campaign with the monsoons immediately ahead. Hardly had the forces moved out of the base camp when torrential rains started. Braving the weather, Ranjit Singh reached Poonch, only to find deserted houses and burnt fields awaiting him — an outcome of treachery on the part of the chief. To lack of food supplies was soon added cholera, which took a heavy toll of his men, including the chief of Artillery, Mian Ghausa. Ranjit Singh was soon pushed out of the hills and stood facing the Kashmir troops in the valley unable to take the offensive. On the other side, Ram Dyal reached Srinagar after several feats of endurance and skill, one of which was the crossing of a hill torrent over a bridge made by chaining the feet of elephants together and standing them side by side. But with his men exhausted and no reinforcements in sight — Bhaia Ram Singh, who had been sent up with

reinforcements, had unaccountably returned to the base camp, — he thought it expedient to exchange presents with the Governor, Azim Khan, and withdraw.

Chapter VII

Conqueror of Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar

After spending some time in subduing the chiefs of Rajauri, Bhimbar and Jhang for insubordination, Ranjit Singh turned his attention once again to Multan. Wazir Fateh Khan, who, since his defeat at Attock, had been busy fighting the Persians in Khorasan, was reported to be out of action with wounds. There was, therefore, no immediate danger from that quarter. In January, 1818, a force of 20,000 men was despatched with Prince Kharak Singh in nominal, and a newly risen officer, Dewan Chand, in actual, command. Artillery, which included the Bhangi Zam Zama, was under the command of Ilahi Bakhsh. The neighbouring forts of Muzaffargarh and Khangarh, which were under the control of Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan, were easily taken. Next, the city was occupied after a siege of two weeks. But the fort held out for another five months. A wide moat around it prevented effective battering of its walls, even with the Zam Zama. At last a party of Nihangs laid a mine under a portion of the walls under cover of darkness and blew a big gap into them. Negotiations were taken up for the surrender of the fort in return for a jagir; but Muzaffar Khan was this time determined to fight to the bitter end and died fighting, along with two sons and a nephew. After the capture of the fort they were buried with military honours. The Nawab's surviving sons, the eldest and the youngest, were taken prisoner. When

they were produced in court, Ranjit Singh got up from his seat, embraced them and made the youngest sit next to him as a mark of respect for their father's bravery. They were both given jagirs.

The conquest of Multan by Ranjit Singh stripped the Afghans of their last stronghold east of the Indus, but they were far from being in a position to do anything about it. Afghanistan was in the throes of a worse civil war than ever. Wazir Fateh Khan, the king-maker, had been treacherously and cruelly put to death by Kamran, the son of his creature, Mahmud, and Fateh Khan's numerous brothers were up in arms all over the country to avenge his murder. The Pathan tribes in the Khyber and Peshawar regions were divided in their allegiance between the rival factions. This was Ranjit Singh's chance to push his north-western frontier up beyond the Indus and thus make it more secure against any recurrence of Afghan incursions. He marched to Hazara through Rohtas, Rawalpindi and Hasan Abdal and sent a reconnaissance party across the Indus by boat. The reconnaissance party was ambushed and destroyed by Khattak tribesmen. The news of this disaster led Ranjit Singh to perform one of those dramatic acts of his which won him a fame for daring and trust in fate. Choosing a point on the bank, almost at random, he lined up his troops and plunged his elephant into the river, and the troops followed him across the river with very few losses. After punishing the Khattaks, he marched on to Peshawar. The Governor, Yar Muhammad Khan, one of the Barakzai brothers, fled at his approach, and he entered the city on 20th November, 1818. After spending three days and installing his own governor, Jahan Dad Khan, the former Governor of Attock, he returned to Lahore. As soon as his back was turned, Yar Muhammad Khan retook the city with the help of his brother, Dost Muhammad Khan. But the necessity of a further operation against Peshawar was obviated

by Dost Muhammad Khan's coming to Lahore and accepting the Durbar's sovereignty over the city.

With his north-western frontier secured for the time being, Ranjit Singh's thoughts turned again to Kashmir. Azim Khan, the Governor, was known to be wavering between staying on to defend Kashmir against a possible attack by Ranjit Singh and going to Afghanistan to join his brothers in settling accounts with Wazir Fateh Khan's murderers. Preparations were, therefore, made quietly to avoid confirming his suspicions. After making an unsuccessful attempt at securing British help, Azim Khan eventually departed, leaving his brother, Jabbar Khan, in charge. By that time (April, 1819) the base camp had been organized at Wazirabad. The army was divided into three groups. The main body was to stay at the base with the Maharaja himself in command. Two columns, one under Dewan Chand, conqueror of Multan, and the other under Prince Kharak Singh, were to march together to Rajauri and from there proceed by different routes so as to meet at Shupaian, where the Afghan army was expected to meet them. Everything went well until the combined columns approached Rajauri. As soon as they did so, they discovered that Agar Khan, the chief of Rajauri, and the chief of Poonch had gone over to the Afghans. Fortunately, the Maharaja, doubting Agar Khan's fidelity, had released Sultan Khan, chief of Bhimbar, from seven years' imprisonment and sent him after the Durbar troops, promising him reinstatement and a reward if he guided the Durbar troops over the mountainous routes. Sultan Khan arrived in time to help the two columns in bypassing Poonch and Rajauri and reaching Shupaian by two different routes at about the same time. There they found the Afghan troops awaiting them in battle formation. The battle that ensued was an unequal contest between the Durbar guns and Afghan horsemen. After a few hours of fighting, Jabbar Khan and his

men fled across the mountains towards the Indus, leaving the valley to be occupied by Ranjit Singh's troops. Kharak Singh and Dewan Chand entered Srinagar on the following day (July 6, 1819). Dewan Moti Ram, son of Dewan Mohkam Chand — that great General had died soon after the second Kashmir campaign — was sent up as Governor of the valley, and Fakir Azizuddin accompanied him with directions to send a detailed report about Kashmir. Troops were despatched to different parts to mop up pockets of resistance. Kashmir was now fully a part of Ranjit Singh's dominions.

Ranjit Singh had offered to win for Shah Shuja the provinces of Multan and Kashmir, which had become practically independent of Kabul, and then accept them from him as a reward for help in restoring him to his throne. This was a fair enough bargain, a gentleman's agreement. But Shah Shuja had distrusted Ranjit Singh's word and thought that he would grab the provinces without fulfilling his part of the contract. Nothing in Ranjit Singh's conduct had given Shuja reason for thinking in this way. Even the Kashmir campaign undertaken by Ranjit Singh jointly with Wazir Fateh Khan had had for its main objective, as events had clearly shown, Shuja's deliverance from his enemies' hands. The Koh-i-Noor transaction had been something outside the main agreement — a special reward for special services rendered — and had not affected its merits. What, if not honour, had prevented Ranjit Singh from seizing the diamond forcibly, bargain or no bargain? It had all the time been with Wafa Begum and he had all the time known that Shuja had, however, chosen to consider the agreement as cancelled and had left Ranjit Singh's protection, after conspiring against him with the common enemy. Ranjit Singh was now master of both Multan and Kashmir in his own right, having won them declaredly for himself as Maharaja of the Punjab. It was better so. A son of the soil had restored to the Punjab what was hers by



Dewan Mohkam Chand "FATEH NASEEB"

the strength of his own arms instead of receiving it on her behalf from an alien as a gift, present, reward, price or call it what you will. Besides, there was no obligation now to fight another man's battles.

For four years after the conquest of Kashmir, Ranjit Singh was busy organizing his army, settling a domestic quarrel with his mother-in-law, Sada Kaur, making some changes in the higher administrative posts, reducing defaulting or disobedient chiefdoms and quelling tribal disturbances in the Hazara area across the Indus. At the end of this period, in 1823, he was called upon to undertake his next major operation — a battle for the recovery of Peshawar. Azim Khan, after his brother, Jabbar Khan, had fled from Kashmir, had come down to Peshawar from Kabul with the intention of persuading or compelling his other brother, Yar Muhammad, to throw off his allegiance to Ranjit Singh. To improve his chances of doing so he had been preaching war against the Sikhs to the Yusufzai and Khattak clans in Peshawar and adjoining districts. The tribesmen had seen unmistakable proof of Yar Muhammad's subservience to Ranjit Singh in the way in which he had received Fakir Azizuddin, who had come down to collect tribute. The Fakir had been given a grand welcome and a gift of magnificently caparisoned horses had been offered to him for the Maharaja.

Hardly had the Fakir left Peshawar when the tribesmen, organizing themselves into bands, rose in open revolt against Yar Muhammad. Rather than face the combined wrath of his brother, Azim Khan, and the tribesmen, Yar Muhammad fled and went into hiding. Peshawar was occupied by Azim Khan, helped by a Sikh deserter, Jai Singh Atariwala. On receiving the news, Ranjit Singh sent Prince Sher Singh at the head of a detachment of cavalry, followed by supporting columns under Dewan Kirpa Ram, Hari Singh Nalwa, Sardar

Attar Singh and Sardar Dharam Singh. They crossed the Indus over a pontoon bridge and took the fort of Jahangira after a short siege, but were soon surrounded by hordes of tribesmen from all over the neighbouring country. Ranjit Singh, who was on his way from Lahore with his European Generals, Allard and Ventura, his Gurkha General, Balbhadra, and a number of other Generals, found on arrival (on March 13, 1823) that the pontoon bridge had been destroyed by the Afghans. Attempts at constructing a makeshift bridge by lashing boats together were frustrated by the sniping which the tribesmen, past-masters at that art, were carrying on. Meanwhile, Sher Singh and the advance columns under his command were threatened with total destruction. There was nothing for it but to ford the river. Ranjit Singh chose the historical ford near the village of Hund, which had been used in the past by Alexander, Muhammad Ghauri and Babar. While groups of tribesmen lined the opposite bank, shouting their war-cries and hurling taunts at the Sikhs, Ranjit Singh plunged his horse in the river, and the rest of the army followed: horses, mules, elephants and camels, carrying men and equipment. The current was strong, and many men and animals were carried away. Nevertheless the immediate objective, the relief of Sher Singh and his men, was achieved. Then boats were collected and the main body crossed the river with elephants carrying guns. The whole army entered Akhora, where Jai Singh Atariwala fell at the Maharaja's feet and was pardoned.

Meanwhile 20,000 men of the Yusufzai and Khattak tribes, having retired from Jahangira, concentrated in a strong position based upon a small eminence, known as Pir Sabak, on the left bank of the Landai river, which runs between Peshawar and Nowshera. They had their reinforcements on neighbouring hills further west. On the opposite bank was encamped Azim Khan with his Kabul troops. The

Maharaja sent a small force under Generals Allard and Ventura to keep him in check and deployed his main force, both horse and foot, against the tribal irregulars on Pir Sabak. The forward columns of the main force were met with matchlock fire from a body of Afghans under Muhammad Zaman Khan, nephew of Azim Khan, coupled with showers of stones hurled by the tribesmen from the heights. There were casualties, including the leader of one of the forward columns, Sat Guru Sahai, who was killed. Then the Sikh cavalry was ordered to charge. Line after line of horsemen advanced, fired and rode back. Unable to do anything against these continuous volleys and having lost half of their numbers, the tribesmen came down towards the evening from their eminence and made a desperate charge on the Sikh cavalry, almost breaking its ranks. Ranjit Singh then himself brought forward his Muslim Najib and Gurkha battalions and placed a strong detachment at the base with orders to shoot down any soldier running away. At the same time, the Durbar troops posted on the other side of the hills advanced to the rear and, charging the tribesmen, dislodged them from their positions there. There followed severe hand-to-hand fighting, in which the fanatical Nihangs under Akali Phula Singh took the largest part. Akali Phula Singh, a special target of the Pathans' hatred, was killed. This intensified the fighting, which resulted in severe losses on both sides.

The fighting lasted until late in the evening, when the surviving tribesmen, unable to sustain it any longer with the heavy odds against them, cut their way through the Sikh cordon and fled into the mountains. Azim Khan had watched the fight from the other bank without trying to cross the river or doing anything to counteract the effect of the Sikh artillery. The tribesmen reassembled on the following day to renew the contest; but Azim Khan had already broken up his camp and was on his way to Peshawar to collect his harem and wealth

and retire to Jalalabad. He reached Jalalabad safely, but shortly after that died — perhaps of a broken heart.

Ranjit Singh entered Peshawar on March 17 at the head of his victorious army. The tribesmen in the surrounding country, however, kept harassing his troops, which were encamped in open country, with nightly plundering raids — reminiscent, to be sure, of the hit-and-run tactics which he himself had employed against the Afghan invaders in his early days. He was, therefore, glad to return to Lahore after reinstating Yar Muhammad Khan as Governor, when the latter presented himself along with his brother, Dost Muhammad Khan, to play yet another of his shifting roles. Ranjit Singh knew that he had more to do to turn his nominal sway over the tribal areas into a reality. So he left behind his most dashing General, Hari Singh Nalwa.

Hari Singh began with operations nearer home in the cis-Indus district of Hazara, where he constructed a fort, naming it Haripur after himself. Barely fifteen miles from Haripur was Sitana, where stood the fort of Syed Akbar Shah, of the Pir Baba family of Buner. It was he who had collected and commanded the Yusufzai and Khattak levies that had fought the Durbar troops at Nowshera. Their defeat rankled in the minds of the tribesmen and they were rallying again under Syed Akbar Shah to expel the Sikhs from their territory. Hari Singh attacked them at Nara at the gateway to the hills between the Indus and Kashmir, but was overwhelmed by their sheer numerical superiority and had to stockade himself. He sent word to Lahore; but before Ranjit Singh, who came personally by forced marches, could arrive on the scene, he had been wounded and had suffered considerable losses in an attempt to break out of the tribal cordon and retire to Haripur. Ranjit Singh crossed the Indus once again in the manner in which he had done so twice before and



General Hari Singh Nalwa

carried out punitive operations against the tribesmen by a round march through Topi and Kotha. He summoned Yar Muhammad to his camp and received from him renewed assurances of allegiance and a present of horses. He then re-turned to Attock by way of Jahangira.

Chapter VIII

Arbiter of Afghan Destinies

Ever since he had left Ranjit Singh's protection and taken up residence at Ludhiana under British protection, Shah Shuja had been casting about for help in recovering his throne. He had approached Ranjit Singh in 1826 without any encouraging response. Then in 1827 he had been told by the British that, in view of their treaty of friendship with Ranjit Singh, they could not do anything to help him unless he induced Ranjit Singh to join hands with them. He had dropped the matter for the time being. In 1831, however, a new vista of hope opened up before him. The Talpur Amirs of Sind promised to espouse his cause. The British had been approaching them for commercial facilities and they suspected that, once the British got a foothold, they would try to establish political control and eventually take Sind over. So to keep them out they expressed willingness to acknowledge Shuja as their titular sovereign. Shuja jumped at this, as it would give him a route to Kauul via Kandahar. He counted upon getting help from Ranjit Singh, who was at the time annoyed with the British for their opposing his designs of extending his dominion over

Sind. The British had cleverly made a survey of the navigational possibilities of the Indus and of economic prospects in Sind by sailing down the river under the pretext of transporting to Lahore five dray-horses sent by the King of England and a coach sent by the Governor-General as gifts to the Maharaja. After that, there had been a meeting at Rupar, on October 26, 1831, between the Maharaja and the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck. At this meeting Ranjit Singh had been told to keep away from Sind, since the Treaty of Amritsar precluded British interference south of the Sutlej only up to its confluence with the Indus and beyond that point the British were free to act as they thought best in their interests. For all the lavish display which had earned for it the high-sounding and mouth-filling name of the "Meeting of the Field of the Cloth of Gold," the meeting had been a fiasco and a great disappointment for Ranjit Singh.

Such being the situation, Shuja sent a message to Ranjit Singh that he was willing to waive his claim to Peshawar and the districts between the Indus and the hills in return for assistance in his regaining the Kabul throne. A treaty of alliance was accordingly signed in 1833, and Shuja proceeded towards Sind; but when he reached Shikarpur, he found that the Amirs had changed their mind. Two things had happened to make them do so. In the first place, they had not relished Shuja's treaty with Ranjit Singh, fearing that it would facilitate the latter's designs upon their territory. In the second place, Dost Muhammad, who held Kabul, had been warning them against the consequences of their supporting Shuja against him. The result was that instead of meeting with the welcome he had been led to expect Shuja had to fight a battle with the Amirs and defeat them before he secured the base he wanted in Shikarpur. This done, he proceeded towards Kandahar through the Bolan Pass. He met with some success to begin with, but was defeated

by Dost Muhammad in July, 1834, and trod his weary way back to Ludhiana once again.

Ranjit Singh, after signing his treaty of alliance with Shah Shuja, was confronted with an urgent problem regarding the governance of Peshawar. Sultan Muhammad, who was then Governor, could not in the nature of things be relied upon to be loyal to him, as he was a brother of Dost Muhammad, against whom the treaty was directed. Nor was any other Afghan forthcoming who would be more reliable and at the same time acceptable to the tribal people. The obvious thing to do seemed to be to bring Peshawar under the Durbar's direct control. Accordingly in May, 1834, Ranjit Singh appointed Hari Singh Nalwa as Governor and sent his grandson, Prince Nau Nihal Singh, to be with him.

Afghanistan at this time stood divided into three more or less independent principalities ruled by groups of Barakzai brothers. One group, led by Dost Muhammad, held Kabul, Ghazni and Jalalabad; another held Kandahar; and still another had been governing Peshawar until Ranjit Singh annexed it. Herat was virtually outside Afghanistan, being held by Kamran, son of Shah Mahmud Saddozai, as a dependency of Persia. Relations among the Barakzai brothers varied from friendship and collaboration to open hostility, but were for the most part shot through with mutual jealousy. Dost Muhammad and Sultan Muhammad had for some time past been approaching the British for help, sometimes jointly and sometimes separately, sometimes against Shuja and sometimes against Ranjit Singh. When, for example, Shuja was marching towards Kandahar after his victory at Shikarpur, Dost Muhammad had gone to the length of tendering his submission as a tributary to the British Crown. But soon after that, when he had defeated Shuja, he had retracted this offer and had instead asked only for help in recovering

Peshawar. The British had, however, all along avoided making any commitment. After the annexation of Peshawar by Ranjit Singh, Dost Muhammad once again appealed to the British for assistance, but his emissary was sent back with nothing better than vague assurances of goodwill.

Meanwhile, Hari Singh Nalwa had not been idle. He had subdued the tribes inhabiting the surrounding country and had also constructed a chain of forts, two at the entrance of the Khyber Pass and one at Jamrud, garrisoning them adequately.

Despairing of British help, Dost Muhammad Khan proceeded from Jalalabad towards Peshawar in 1835. As he had hoped, tribesmen rallied in large numbers under his banner along the route of his march. Having passed the defiles of Khyber, he encamped at Shekan at the foot of the hills facing the plains of Peshawar. Ranjit Singh was at that time enjoying a hunting holiday in the country east of the Indus. He arrived on the scene by forced marches. What followed was a major victory won without a battle — by sheer superiority of tactics. Ranjit Singh's army was superior to Dost Muhammad's in every respect: numbers, equipment, discipline, morale. If, therefore, it came to a pitched battle, he had nothing to fear. He was, however, not interested in destroying the Afghan army or in killing or capturing Dost Muhammad. His purposes would be sufficiently served by making the Amir see reason, submit to the inevitable, and withdraw. He, therefore, sent Fakir Azizuddin and Josiah Harlan to the Amir to induce him to do so. Simultaneously, he disposed his troops in a semi-circle half surrounding the Afghan positions; but he did so quietly and without moving the detachments nearest the Afghan positions so as to excite no suspicion. As has already been mentioned in Chapter V of the First Part, the envoys met with an unpleasant reception and when,

after Fakir Azizuddin had been subjected to an agonising debate, the Amir found that he was surrounded and had no course open to him but to withdraw, he had the envoys arrested with the intention of carrying them off as hostages. It was Sultan Muhammad Khan who saved them. They were made over to him with instructions to take them along with him to Jalalabad. Not only did he not follow the Amir in his retreat, but he sent the envoys with all honour back to the Maharaja. This was because he had given up all hope of gaining anything if he allied himself with Dost Muhammad.

Crestfallen at having been so ludicrously outwitted, Dost Muhammad retired for some time into a religious retreat corner. When he came out of it sufficiently consoled, he re-opened negotiations with the British and, having failed to elicit any support from them, turned next to the Persians, again in vain. As a last resort, he tried coming to terms with Ranjit Singh. So anxious was he to re-establish his family's connection with Peshawar that he was even willing to consider accepting it as a tributary of the Maharaja. But the negotiations broke down on a point of protocol. Ranjit Singh asked for a gift of horses, which, the Amir apprehended, would be represented by Ranjit Singh as signifying not merely that the Amir had been given Peshawar as a tributary, but that he was being allowed to retain Kabul itself at the pleasure of Ranjit Singh. This would not save the Amir's face; on the contrary, it would expose him to further loss of prestige and a possible risk of being turned out of Kabul in the event of his incurring the Maharaja's displeasure. The Amir, therefore, decided to try his luck again at arms.

In April 1837, he sent to Peshawar an army of 25,000 men, with eighteen heavy guns, under the command of his sons. The strategy he resolved upon was to deal with the

Durbar garrisons at Shabkadar, Jamrud and Peshawar one after another by isolating them. While a detachment attacked Shabkadar, the main army besieged Jamrud fort, which had a small garrison of 600 men and only four light guns. The fort collapsed within a few hours under the heavy cannonade of the Afghans; but before it could be carried, Hari Singh, who had been lying ill in Peshawar, appeared with reinforcements. His appearance changed the pattern of the fighting. The Afghan troops, which were on the point of taking the fort, made a discreet withdrawal into the Khyber valley, where they took up positions. Hari Singh, for his part, drew up his troops in battle formation and waited for the Afghans to attack. The armies came to grips after seven days, on April 30, 1837. The fighting was severe, and the Durbar troops drove the Afghans from their positions, capturing fourteen of their guns. At this juncture, the Afghans received fresh reinforcements, which turned the tide momentarily in their favour. To stem it, Hari Singh Nalwa, who never hesitated to take personal risks, rushed into the thick of the fighting and fell back grievously wounded in his howdah. In the confusion that this caused among the Durbar troops, the Afghans recaptured eleven of their lost guns and also three belonging to the Durbar troops; but the latter entrenched themselves under the walls of the fort and prevented it from being taken. The success of the Afghans was confined to their killing Hari Singh Nalwa; for he died soon after having been carried off the field to the fort. As against this, they left more than a thousand of their men dead in the field, and they had captured none of the three forts which they had set out to capture.

Dost Muhammad was not sure whether his troops had won or lost. So he wrote to the Maharaja asking for Peshawar and offering to pay tribute for it. At the same time he threatened to fight on and seek the help of other powers, if his request was turned down. Ranjit Singh assumed that the other powers

which the Amir was referring to were none other than the British. He also felt sure that the British would not side with the Amir against him. So he advised the Amir to forget Peshawar and send him a tribute of horses and Kabul specialities, if he valued his throne at Kabul. In the meantime Ranjit Singh, although hardly recovered from a paralytic stroke, advanced in person as far as Rohtas and sent his Prime Minister, Dhian Singh, with the flower of the Durbar army to Jamrud. Such was the speed of the operation that field batteries were dragged up from Ramnagar on the Chenab to Peshawar, a distance of over 200 miles, in six days, and the fort of Jamrud was reconstructed in a similarly short time. Ranjit Singh then waited for the next move to come from Dost Muhammad.

Things were also happening at Kabul. When Dost Muhammad Khan had threatened to seek the help of other powers, it was not the British that he had meant — Ranjit Singh had misunderstood him — but another power which was casting a lengthening shadow over the region, namely, Russia. The Russians had established themselves in Persia and were now seeking entry into Afghanistan, standing behind a large Persian army assembled for the siege of Herat. If this expedition succeeded, it would bring them closer to the northwestern frontier of India by one remove. The British felt seriously perturbed over this, because it spelt danger to their plan of extending their influence to Afghanistan as a sequel to the treaty they had signed in 1832 with Ranjit Singh, the Amirs of Sind and the Nawab of Bahawalpur for navigation in the Indus. They, therefore, sent Alexander Burnes to Kabul in September, 1837. The avowed object of Burnes' visit was to explore the possibilities of a commercial treaty; but its real object was to find out how far Dost Muhammad would co-operate with the British in stemming the tide of Russian influence. Dost Muhammad met Burnes' commercial

overtures with a point-blank demand for men and munitions to expel Ranjit Singh from Peshawar. Burnes pleaded the British treaty of friendship with the Maharaja and could only offer British good offices in bringing about an amicable understanding between the two adversaries. Dost Muhammad talked of the Russian threat and Burnes was convinced of its reality by its providential appearance in the garb of an envoy from the Russian Ambassador at Tehran carrying a letter for Dost Muhammad which said, "Trust him with your secrets".

The logical outcome of all this was a treaty of alliance and friendship signed on June 25, 1838, by the British, Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja. This treaty reaffirmed the 1833 treaty between the Maharaja and the Shah, with the British Government added as an underwriter. Its objective was the installation of Shah Shuja as the ruler of the whole of Afghanistan, minus Herat (which, it was felt, had better remain where it was) by means of a joint military operation. Ranjit Singh had, in deference to British wishes, refrained from taking Shikarpur when Kharak Singh had stood at its threshold after punishing the Mazaris for raiding villages in the Durbar's domains. He, therefore, hinted at his being given Jalalabad as his share of the spoils after the conquest. Shuja bought him off with the offer of a present which he could never resist, namely horses — fifty-five every year of the best that Afghanistan bred. It was horses which had frightened Dost Muhammad off when Ranjit Singh had asked him to send them as a gift. Now they were being offered voluntarily by Dost Muhammad's rival. Ranjit Singh accepted the offer. He may have appeared to be acting like a child being bribed with a doll to keep quiet; indeed, he was a child at heart to his dying day, especially where horses were concerned. But he was at the same time as good a judge of men — and of events, which men shape — as he was a connoisseur of horses.

He knew that neither the British nor the Afghans would be happy if he took Jalalabad or any other territory which had never been a part of India and that he would then be hemmed in between two disaffected neighbours.

Earlier, during the negotiations for the treaty it had been left open to him by the British to undertake the expedition entirely on his own and British co-operation had been offered to him only in case he wanted it. His Prime Minister, Dhian Singh, had advised against acceptance of British co-operation, but he had preferred to act on the advice of Fakir Azizuddin and Bhaia Ram Singh to ask the British to join him. His army was strong enough to handle the task with its own resources; but he had thought that, if he failed or if his army suffered serious losses, the consequent loss of his prestige and reduction of his strength would diminish the status he enjoyed in the eyes of the British. However, it was not ordained by fate that he should live long enough either to renew his claim to Jalalabad or to receive the alternative present of horses. The British component of the Army of the Indus, as the combined forces were called, captured Kandahar on April 25, 1839, and Shah Shuja was enthroned on May 8; but Ranjit Singh died on June 27, before his own forces captured Ghazni and Kabul and completed the task of restoring to Shah Shuja his ancestral dominion. The task might have been accomplished many years earlier, if only Shah Shuja had trusted him.

PART THREE

THE PEN AND THE SWORD

Chapter 1

The Pen

When Ranjit Singh was only a misldar, his entire establishment consisted of a *dewan* (financial manager), a ***toshakhania*** (treasurer) and a few ***munshis*** (clerks). After he became Maharaja, he gradually built up a departmental organization which at its height consisted of fifteen offices, viz., the Sarishta-i-Hazur, the Daftar of Devi Das, the Naql Daftar, the Sarishta-i-Dewani, the Sarishta-i-Bhawani Das, the General Secretariat, the Daftar of Ganga Ram, the Sarishta-i-Daftar, the Daftar Tosha Khana-i-Khas, the Tenth Daftar, the Daftar-i-Shahzada, the Daftar-i-Darogha, the Daftar-i-Roznamcha, the Daftar-i-Moharyani, and the Daftar-i-Khas or the Daftar-i-Mualla. This set-up was organized by Dewan Bhawani Das, who had served Shah Shuja as a high revenue officer. He was assisted by Dewan Ganga Ram, who had seen service under the Maharaja of Gwalior. These two officers headed some of the offices and maintained their personal seals, which were affixed to the papers passing through their hands in addition to the royal seal. After Dewan Ganga Ram's death in 1816, Raja Dina Nath received charge of the royal seal and in 1834, on the death of Dewan Bhawani Das, he became the head of the civil and financial administration. Bhai Ram Singh, Bhai Govind Ram and Fakir Azizuddin also dealt with civil matters occasionally.

The offices functioned in the following way. When the Maharaja passed a pay order — he always did so orally

and in Punjabi — it was taken down in Persian by a munshi, if one was present. When there was no munshi in attendance, one or other of the ministers or officers present reduced the order to writing and communicated it to a munshi, who put it in proper form, in Persian, affixing his department's seal to it. The order was then presented to the Maharaja for approval. Illiterate as he was, he had acquired a good working knowledge of Persian and was able to understand the gist of whatever was read out to him. Quite often, when a draft prepared by a munshi did not correctly represent the substance of his oral order, he suggested amendments or asked for a revised draft to be submitted. After an order had been approved two seals were put on it: one had the inscription, "Akal Sahai Ranjit Singh", in Gurmukhi and the other the inscription, "Mulahiza shud", in Persian. After being thus sealed, the order went round the various offices concerned. It first went to the Sarishta-i-Hazur, where it was recorded and stamped with a seal having the caption, "Az Qarar-i-Hukm-i-Ashraf", and the inscription, "Sabt-i-Sarishta-i- Hazur Shud". Then it was sent on to the Daftar of Devi Das, where it was noted and stamped. It next went to the Daftar of Bhawani Das, where it was taken note of and stamped further. Then it went to the General Secretariat, where it was submitted to a further process of recording and stamping, after which it was forwarded to the Naql Daftar (the copying office). Here it was copied word for word. It was then transmitted to the Daftar of Ganga Sahai for information and record. There were, in the later years, two or three more offices through which it passed before it reached the Toshakhana (treasury), where the payment was made. In some cases, the Daftar-i-Dewani, the Daftar-i-Mualla and the Daftar-i-Khas also came into the picture.

It seems that, as time went by, this chain of circulation — even longer than the interdepartmental machinery of a

modern government — was found cumbersome. One link after another was, therefore, dropped out until, towards the end of Ranjit Singh's reign, there remained only one seal: either that of Dewan Kirpa Ram or that of Har Sukh Rai, the keeper of the royal seal.

So much for the central administrative set-up. As regards local government, the Punjab was divided into four provinces, namely, Lahore, Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar. Outside these were a number of hill principalities which were not directly administered by the Maharaja but paid annual tribute. Each province was divided into parganas, each pargana into talukas and each taluka into 50 to 100 mauzas — a pattern of territorial division copied from the Mughals. Each province was administered by a *nazim* (governor), who had a number of *kardars* (district officers) under him. The kardar, like the district officer of today, was the principal representative of the Central Government in his area and was responsible for the general welfare of the people. He combined in himself the duties of a revenue collector, a settlement officer, a treasury officer, a judge, a magistrate, an excise and customs officer and an officer in charge of law and order.

The nazims and kardars were either men of wealth, position and influence sent out by the Maharaja — men like Hari Singh Nalwa, Dewan Sawan Mal and Sardar Lehna Singh — or men of merit like General Avitabile, or local military chiefs who held demesnes on the condition of sending contingents to help the Maharaja in fighting his wars.

With his remarkable gift of selecting the right men and inspiring them with devotion, Ranjit Singh found it practicable to delegate a large measure of authority to his territorial administrative officers. He reserved to himself the

right to hear complaints and issue final orders in matters that came up to him. Apart from this, it was his habit to make random inquiries, often in public, whenever he visited outlying parts of his kingdom. The principal check on the officers, however, was a centrally administered and vigilant financial control.

In the beginning the chief instrument of financial control was the Maharaja's phenomenal memory: he had a remarkable capacity for remembering complicated accounts of income and expenditure. There were, however, limits to the exercise of this personal control, with the result that cases of embezzlement began to occur. He then had an audit system instituted by Dewan Bhawani Das, which worked fairly well. Financial malpractices were punished with fines, expropriations and dismissals. It sometimes happened that officers died unaccountably rich. In such cases, the Maharaja's method of balancing the accounts was to confiscate the officers' properties; but he never left their heirs unprovided for.

The revenues of the state were derived principally from tributes, nazranas, excise and custom duties and land revenue. There was no regular budget of the modern type, but a balance was maintained between income and expenditure by periodic revisions of both. No reliable statistics of the total revenue are available; but there are two rather widely divergent estimates made by casual observers which convey a rough idea of its size. The first estimate, which is given by Henry T. Prinsep, is as follows:—

Source	**Annual Income**
Land Revenue and Tributes	Rs. 1,24,03,900
Customs	Rs. 19,00,600
Moharana	Rs. 5,77,000
Total:—	Rs. 1,48,81,500

The second estimate, which follows, is given by Shahamat Ali:—

Source	Annual Income
Khalsa	Rs. 1,96,57,172
Jagirs	Rs. 87,54,590
Khirajdars	Rs. 12,66,000
Custom Duties	Rs. 5,50,000
Total:—	Rs. 3,02,27,762

The total population of the kingdom has been estimated on a rough basis at 53,50,000. The cost of living can be judged from the fact that the price of the staple food, wheat was fourteen annas a maund.

For the realization of excise and custom duties there was a network of custom barriers and posts. Duties were imposed on all articles irrespective of their origin or destination, and no distinction was made between luxuries and necessaries. The rates were fixed on a common sense basis and were uniform throughout the kingdom.

The government gave back with one hand what it took with the other. Remissions of land revenue in times of calamity, refunds of excessive taxes, measures for famine relief, distribution of seed and taccavi loans to agriculturists, encouragement of trade and industry — these and similar measures for the welfare of the community, which modern governments pride themselves upon, were not infrequent. A few instances of Ranjit Singh's anxiety not to make any oppressive exactions from the people will suffice. When Jamadar Khushal Singh brought a large sum of money from Kashmir in 1833

despite the fact that the province was in the grip of a famine, the Maharaja was shocked and displeased. He sent to Kashmir thousands of mules loaded with wheat and arranged for its distribution from Muslim mosques and Hindu temples. He deputed four companies of soldiers to collect all the Kashmir people in the plain and distribute flour, blankets and money among them. On another occasion General Avitabile unjustly exacted a fine of two hundred rupees from the Khatris of Peshawar and demolished their houses. When this became known to the Maharaja, he sent General Ventura post-haste to Peshawar with orders to refund the fine and have the houses rebuilt at the expense of the state. On still another occasion, when the Maharaja's camp continued at Rohtas for a long period, a remission of rent was granted to the people of the city.

Apart from measures of relief, positive encouragement was given to both agriculture and industry. Inundation canals were dug in the south-western plains and in other tracts where rainfall was scanty. Wells and *jhalars* were also provided in many areas. To improve the livestock, the Maharaja maintained a number of good draught stud bulls in different thanas. Cattle fairs were also frequently held. Land revenue was charged according to the condition of the crop. Remissions were granted on poor crops and no charge was made for raising fodder crops. The Maharaja took a personal interest in promoting arts and crafts. For example, after Multan was annexed, he began to make presents of its silk goods to his courtiers and visitors. It soon became fashionable among the aristocracy to wear sashes and scarves of Multan silk. The industries of Lahore and Amritsar similarly found a generous patron in him.

Education in those days was imparted mostly in mosques, temples and gurdwaras. Ranjit Singh's munificent

donations to these religious institutions indirectly contributed to the promotion of education. Apart from this, he patronised centres of higher learning. For example, there was an institute of Arabic and Persian scholarships in the Bazar-i-Hakiman in Lahore, which received aid from him in the shape of donations and stipends for poor students. Nor were the fine arts neglected. Painting, for example, flourished under his patronage and a Sikh school of painting came into existence. It was an eclectic school, combining the Mughal method of treating the subject with the vivid colours of the Kangra school. There were a number of painters at his court, of whom the most prominent were Muhammad Bakhsh, Kehr Singh and Purkhu of Kangra. Ranjit Singh himself had a keen aesthetic sense. He designed a marble summerhouse with twelve doors in Hazuri Bagh and had it constructed under his personal supervision. No less artistic than the summerhouse — on another scale and in another medium — were the lanterns he had fixed on the upturned tusks of Sundargaj, the most imposing of his seven hundred-odd elephants. These lanterns were a combination of beauty and utility: they lent a baroque grandeur to Sundargaj and also lighted the way for him and for others. It used to be a grand sight when Sundargaj passed at night through the streets of Lahore, especially through Moti Bazar, the most fashionable shopping centre of the city, lined with jewellers' shops. With his jewel-studded gold howdah glittering in the light of his own lanterns added to the shop lights, he used to look like a walking jeweller's shop. Quite imaginably, the effect was further heightened when Sundargaj carried on his back one of the jewels of the royal harem, Moran or Gul Begum, and his lanterns lit up her beauty and the magnificence of her dress.

Ranjit Singh's patronage of commerce, industry and arts and crafts brought about a good deal of urban development. There were four principal cities with populations

quite large for those days — viz., Lahore (75,000), Amritsar (60,000), Peshawar (55,000) and Multan (45,000). Civic amenities, especially sanitation, in these cities were primitive. It is, therefore, remarkable that there were no epidemics: cholera was of rare occurrence, and plague was unknown. Perhaps people had more resistance in those days than they have now-a-days, because they had better food to eat, and plenty of it, too. There was a chain of dispensaries, especially in Lahore, where unani medicine was dispensed free of charge. Fakir Nuruddin supervised these dispensaries. Communications were nothing like what they are today, but there were mail runners between the principal cities. Nor was there anything like the network of roads we have in modern times; but what roads there existed were safe to travel on because there were few highwaymen. Narrow and unmetalled as they were, they were good enough for the means of travel that existed — elephants, horses, mules, bullock-carts, two-wheeled horse-carriages and palanquins. The most popular modes of travel were on foot and on horseback. All along the highways there were wells and sarais.

Ranjit Singh gave the Punjab forty years of peace, prosperity and progress of an order which it had not known since the time of the Great Mughals.

Chapter II

The Sword

When Jaswant Rao Holkar took leave of Ranjit Singh for good in 1806, the parting advice he gave the Maharaja was that he should build up a regular army, with artillery and infantry as its principal components. This was honest, advice based upon half-a-century of Indian experience. Balaji Bajirao, Madhoji Scindia, Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan and Holkar himself had stood up to the British mainly on the strength of their regular battalions of artillery and infantry trained by European officers. Ranjit Singh at once saw the point of Holkar's advice. The feudal levies of horsemen which had composed the Dal Khalsa during the period of Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions and their aftermath were now out of date. They could not be expected to hold their own against European armies equipped with new weapons and trained in new methods of war. Ranjit Singh inspected Holkar's western-model troops and was much impressed with their turn-out and discipline. There was, however, one thing he could not puzzle out: why had they fled before Lord Lake's troops, which were similarly equipped and trained? It was to find the answer to this question that he paid the incognito visit to Lake's camp which has been mentioned in an earlier chapter. The answer he found was that the British troops were even better trained than Holkar's. Ranjit Singh, therefore, resolved to change the entire organization of the Khalsa army, laying more stress on infantry and artillery than on cavalry, and, above all, to make proper arrangements for training.

The infantry proved difficult to organize to begin with. Indian army traditions accorded a very low rank and social status to foot soldiers. In Akbar's time they were bracketed with gate-keepers, palace guards, letter-carriers and palanquin-bearers. The Sikhs before Ranjit Singh promoted their status a little by using them for garrisoning forts; but they were still ranked far below horsemen. Sikhs were, therefore, not willing to enlist as foot soldiers. Ranjit Singh began by recruiting Hindustani deserters from the East India Company's troops, and he gave training jobs to the senior men among them. In order to make the infantry popular he used to attend its parades in person and to extend special favours to infantrymen. Once the branch became popular with the Sikhs, he began to be selective: he recruited the pick of the youth of the country, laying special emphasis upon good looks and physical fitness. Hindus and Muslims also came in and were selected on the same criteria. Two European officers, Allard and Ventura, joined the Maharaja's service later on, and helped in putting his infantry on a proper footing. In 1838 the infantry had a strength of 29,617 and drew a monthly salary of Rs. 2,27,660.

After organizing the infantry, the Maharaja turned his attention to the artillery. The Sikhs had no experience of heavy artillery and only knew how to use small swivel guns. In the beginning Ranjit Singh had to import both officers and gunners from outside the Punjab. Among the senior officers he recruited were two Europeans, Claude Auguste Court and Alexander Gardner. In order to cast guns, Ranjit Singh had a number of gun factories, of which local men, trained by the foreign officers, took charge in due course. In 1838-39, the artillery had a strength of 4,535, with 188 heavy guns and 280 swivels and its monthly salary was Rs. 32,906.

The cavalry continued to be a branch of the army and was divided into three groups, viz., the regular cavalry, the Ghorcharha Fauj and the Jagirdari Fauj. In 1838, the regular cavalry had a strength of 4,090 and drew a monthly salary of Rs. 90,375. The Ghorcharha Fauj was manned by representatives of the powerful families of the country whom Ranjit Singh thought it necessary to keep near his court for political reasons. It was his constant endeavour to win their loyalty and attachment. Therefore, he treated them generously. He bestowed distinctions and other marks of favour on them and even gave cash allowances to some of them. These sardars came along with their warriors, who were absorbed into the main army. For instance, the troops of the Nakkai and Kanhaya sardars were taken over bodily and formed part, respectively, of the corps commanded by Prince Kharak Singh and Prince Sher Singh. Almost all the military classes of the Punjab were represented in the Ghorcharha Fauj — Jat Sikhs, Hindu Rajputs, Muslim Rajputs, Pathans, Khatris, Brahmins and so on. The pay and emoluments were higher than in the regular army. The recruits were expected to bring their own horses and arms; but this was often relaxed. In 1838, the Ghorcharha Fauj numbered 10,795 and drew a yearly salary of Rs. 31,68,714.

The Jagirdari cavalry was raised on the basis of feudal levies. The chiefs and their men ordinarily lived on their own jagirs, presenting themselves for a review once a year at Dussehra time. The Maharaja used to take a strict muster of these troops personally to make sure that his fief-holders were carrying out their obligations; and failure to do so was punished severely. Even General Hari Singh Nalwa was on one occasion fined two lakhs of rupees for failing to produce the number of men he had undertaken to maintain.

The Ghorcharha Fauj was the aristocratic branch of the army by reason of its origin, and its officers vied with

each other in maintaining its dignity. There was no prescribed uniform. This gave the officers full scope for trying to outshine their compeers in their dress, equipment and arms. Some wore velvet or silk coats, and over them a shirt of mail. Some had pink, others yellow, turbans, and all wore a belt round the waist, embroidered in gold, which supported a powder-horn and a Persian sword with the addition of a pistol in some cases. There were some who wore a steel helmet with a black heron's plume on it. Some also carried a bow and a quiver. All bore buffalo-hide shields on their backs.

Ranjit Singh's "feringhees", as the foreign officers were popularly called, were a colourful lot. Their number has been estimated variously: the highest estimate is 42 and the lowest 20. They were Italians, Frenchmen, Americans, Englishmen, Greeks, Russians, Germans, Scotchmen and Anglo-Indians.

He started recruiting them soon after the Treaty of Amritsar (1809), which he realized was a diplomatic defeat he had had to swallow because of his being militarily weaker than the British. The first to join was an Englishman called Price, a deserter from Ochterlony's troops. Then came a number of Anglo-Indian soldiers of fortune, some of them sons of well-known British officers, including Robert Dick, son of Major-General Sir Robert Dick, and Jacob Thomas, son of the famous adventurer, George Thomas. But the first foreign officers who proved really valuable acquisitions were Jean Francois Allard and Jean Baptiste Ventura, who joined Ranjit Singh's service in 1822. Allard was a Frenchman and Ventura an Italian. Both came of good families and both had served under Napoleon in the armies of Spain and Italy. After the declaration of peace they had been demobilized and had unsuccessfully tried their fortune in Egypt and Persia. They had then come to Lahore, travelling through Herat,

Kandahar, Kabul and Peshawar. Ranjit Singh took two months to examine their qualifications, verify their bonafides and put them to practical tests before he gave them employment. Allard was commissioned to raise a corps of dragoons, to be disciplined and armed exactly on the same lines as a cavalry corps in Europe. Ventura was put in command of the Fauj-i-Khas, which was a special brigade, the first in rank, discipline and equipment in the Khalsa army. Both were given liberal salaries of the order of Rs. 30,000 a year. Allard was allotted as his residence a commodious building, which stood where the house known as Kapurthala House in British times was subsequently constructed. The place is popularly known as *Kuri bagh* (Girl's Garden) because it contains the tomb of Allard's daughter. Ventura was given Anarkali's tomb to live in: a marble tablet outside the Chief Secretary's room in the West Pakistan Secretariat, contiguous to Anarkali's tomb, commemorates this fact. Allard and Ventura were both promoted to the rank of General and were held in high regard by the Maharaja. Allard was decorated with the Order of the Star of the Prosperity of the Punjab and was entrusted with very important missions. He married a Kashmiri woman and had several children by her: the girl whose tomb has given the popular name of Kuri Bagh to his compound was one of them. He once went home on leave and, when he came back, he brought with him a personal letter addressed by the King of France, Louis Phillipe, to Ranjit Singh. He died at Peshawar in January, 1838, and his body was embalmed and brought to Lahore, where it lay in state before being buried in a cemetery outside the city walls.

Ventura made an excellent job of the Fauj-i-Khas. It consisted of four infantry battalions and two regiments of cavalry, and gave a good account of itself in many campaigns, especially in the hills and around Peshawar. Ventura married an Armenian woman from Ludhiana, but maintained a harem

of Kashmiri and Punjabi women and lived in great style. The Maharaja thought so well of his administrative ability that he appointed him to officiate once or twice as Governor of Lahore.

Another prominent foreign officer was Colonel Henry Court, a Frenchman of noble birth educated at the Ecole Polytechnique of Paris. He commanded two battalions of Gurkhas to begin with and later on organized what was known as the French Legion. He was a man of culture and refinement and devoted himself to scholarly pursuits in addition to his profession.

The most dramatic of Ranjit Singh's foreign officers was Paolo de Avitabile, an Italian by birth, who had risen from the ranks and had also seen service in Persia. He was a stout six-footer, gruff in his manners and ruthless in his methods of administration. He was, therefore, generally employed where a heavy hand was needed to put down turbulent elements. He was first posted as Governor of Wazirabad, but was later transferred to Peshawar as Military Commander. He also paid a visit to France, where he was received by King Louis Philippe, who awarded him the Cross of the Legion of Honour and honorary rank of General of the French Army.

Ranjit Singh used his foreign officers mostly for purposes of training. Although he gave them responsible positions, he never put them in supreme command of any major expedition. This did not proceed so much from lack of trust in their loyalty — although that was probably one factor — as from his anxiety to groom his own nationals for generalship. The administrative posts to which he assigned them occasionally were intended as a kind of compensation for their being kept out of supreme command, to which some of them naturally aspired by reason of their seniority. There was also

a degree of political sagacity behind this. Difficult and unpopular administrative assignments could be handled more easily by foreigners than by local officers having family and personal attachments. It was Ranjit Singh's genuine desire to induce his foreign officers to settle down permanently in the Punjab; but, with a very few exceptions, ties of home proved stronger in the long run than good jobs, high salaries, and the paraphernalia of luxurious living.

Azizuddin mentions an incident which caused the Maharaja much disappointment and disillusionment. While out on a walk during Mac Naughten's visit to Lahore, he met three Englishmen on the latter's staff and had a casual conversation with them about his European officers. He mentioned to the Englishmen that the European officers had all given him a solemn undertaking to fight for him against all his enemies. The Englishmen remarked that these undertakings could not be relied upon so far as fighting against the troops of the officers' own countries was concerned. On returning to the fort, Ranjit Singh related this conversation to Raja Dhian Singh and Fakir Azizuddin with much grief. He wondered what more he could do than he had done to make the foreign officers happy. He had given them princely salaries. (For example, Avitabile started on a salary of Rs. 5,000/- a month, equivalent to a lakh of rupees today. Allard and Ventura, as already mentioned, were given a starting salary of Rs. 2,500/- a month. These starting salaries were increased later on). He had conferred honours and jagirs on them. He had always treated them with consideration and confidence. Although he had recruited them only for training his men, he had kept them on after their training jobs were finished; in fact, he had sometimes had to find or create jobs for them.

Dhian Singh was anti-European. He, therefore, angrily said that the European officers were all gold-diggers

and opportunists. Azizuddin had the same liberal and cosmopolitan outlook as the Maharaja. So he remarked that, although it was a pity the European officers could not be made to regard the Punjab as their home, they had nevertheless made a valuable contribution to the regime. He thought it had been worthwhile to engage them. The Maharaja remained in a pensive mood for a long time after this conversation.

PART FOUR

HUMANITY INDEED

Humanity indeed, or rather a tenderness for life, was a trait in the character of Ranjit Singh. —

. . . . . *Captain Murray*

CHAPTER I

The Ambitious Mother-in-Law

The marriage of Ranjit Singh, sixteen-year-old chief of the Sukerchakia misl, and Mehtab Kaur, fourteen-year-old granddaughter of Jai Singh, chief of the Kanhaya misl, in 1796, was hailed by the whole Sikh community as a great occasion. It was an alliance between the premier misl and one that was also prominent — an important enough event. But it was to acquire a greater importance than anybody could then foresee. It brought together two of the most dynamic Sikh personalities of the time, Ranjit Singh and his mother-in-law, Sada Kaur, who by both working together and working against each other determined the course of Sikh history for the next forty years.

Since her husband's death five years earlier in a skirmish with Ranjit Singh's father, Sada Kaur had been devoting all her time to bringing up Mehtab Kaur, her only child. There was, therefore, nothing to detain her in her husband's home after Mehtab Kaur's marriage, and so she accompanied the bride to her new home to live with her there. If her object in doing so was to bring the newly married couple close together, she was not successful in achieving it. The young people had their own reasons for not being fond of each other. In fact, it is likely that her meddling in their affairs drove them farther apart. However, this object was ancillary

to a larger one, which was to groom her son-in-law for the leadership of the Sikh community. He had already shown promise of fitness for that role by the way he had ambushed and defeated the Bhangis at the tender age of twelve, when his father had suddenly died in the midst of an expedition against them. The role she envisaged for herself was that of the power behind the throne. It was not practical for a woman to think of ruling the whole Sikh community in her own name, and she had no man in her own family whom she could use as her ladder. She had thought out her plans immediately after her husband's death, which had left her faced with the gloomy prospect of being driven out of the Kanhaya misl by her husband's younger brothers as soon as her father-in-law died. These brothers-in-law of hers were imbeciles and she knew that, if she could get proper support from some quarter, she could throw them out of the misl before they threw her out. It was with the object of getting this support that she had conceived the idea of betrothing her daughter to Ranjit Singh and she had worked hard to bring the betrothal about, subduing her anger against the son of her husband's assassin. She had already enjoyed the first fruits of the prospective alliance: it had strengthened her hands so much that on her father-in-law's death in 1793 she had been able to make her mother-in-law and her two sons retire, leaving her to govern the misl. She had established her headquarters at Batala and raised a force strong enough to have defeated her family's old foe, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. Now that the long-projected marriage was an accomplished fact, the time had come for her to start preparing the ground for the ambitious plan which it was intended to serve.

The first thing for Sada Kaur to do was obviously to bring Ranjit Singh under her thumb. Unfortunately, he was tied to his mother's apron strings and seemed quite happy to let her manage the affairs of his state with the assistance of his

father's dewan, Lakhpat Rai. Ranjit Singh had always looked up to Lakhpat Rai with the respect due to his father's principal officer and, therefore, had implicit faith in his ability and honesty. Sada Kaur began to poison Ranjit Singh's ears against Lakhpat Rai by suggesting that he was misappropriating funds. Ranjit Singh for some time turned a deaf ear to her allegations; but when they became persistent, he passed them on to his mother, who told him that he should not let evil thoughts about his father's trusted servant cross his mind. Once or twice he tried to get his mother or Lakhpat Rai to explain things to him and satisfy him; but matters of estate management and accounts were too complicated for his immature understanding. So he let them pass. Sada Kaur then tried to interfere directly and openly, which led to clashes between her and Ranjit Singh's mother. Matters reached such a state that there were constant charges and counter-charges, quarrels and fights, and even exchanges of abusive language. Ranjit Singh's home became intolerable for him. So he threw himself with abandon into his favourite pastimes of riding and hunting. He might have gone on with them indefinitely had not the Afghan invader, Shah Zaman, made his appearance in 1796 and again in 1797. On both occasions it was Sada Kaur who persuaded Ranjit Singh not to follow the example of the chiefs who had fled to the safety of the hills but to stay behind and fight. It was she who urged him to summon a meeting of the Sarbat Khalsa at Amritsar. It was the spirited appeal she made to the assembled chiefs and the threat that even if everybody else ran away she, a woman, would fight the invader alone which banded the chiefs together under the leadership of her son-in-law.

But after the excitement of these emergencies was over, Ranjit Singh returned to the loneliness and misery of his

home life. Torn between the intrigues of his mother and his mother-in-law — intrigues for power and influence and for the possession of his mind — he longed for somebody in whom his young heart could lodge its affections. His wife, Mehtab Kaur, was not willing to lend herself to such a role : she was even less of a companion than the two women fighting over him. So, four years after his first marriage, he took a second wife, Raj Kaur, daughter of the Nakkai chief. She brought sweetness and light into his life and provided for him a focus of interest in his home. Spending more time at home than he had ever done before, he began to look into the affairs of his estate and soon found that he could and must take their management into his own hands. The occasion for him to do so was providentially provided by the murder of Lakhpat Rai. This proved the signal for Sada Kaur's departure: taking Mehtab Kaur with her, she went away to Batala in a huff. She had gained a Pyrrhic victory. She had dislodged Ranjit Singh's mother and Lakhpat Rai, but she had not been successful in taking their place.

However, she did not have to return to Ranjit Singh's home to make him do big things. An opportunity of doing so otherwise came soon. The citizens of Lahore appealed to her as well as to Ranjit Singh to deliver them from the Sikh triumvirate misruling the city since Shah Zaman's withdrawal. Ranjit Singh mustered what troops he could and proceeded to Batala to consult his mother-in-law. She was waiting for him and, when he marched into the city, she marched by his side at the head of her own troops. She had helped in planning the surprise take-over which the whole affair was. Later on, again, it was she who advised Ranjit Singh to compel Chet Singh to surrender by the simple device of denying him provisions instead of storming Lahore fort. Yet again, when, after the capture of Lahore, the Bhangis, the Ramgarhias and Nizamuddin of Kasur joined forces and marched

towards the city, it was Sada Kaur who fought Jassa Singh Ramgarhia near Batala and defeated him — she had already learnt how to do so —, while Ranjit Singh himself tackled the rest of the combined forces at Bhasin.

Ranjit Singh repaid the debt a year later by winning back for her a part of her territory which Sansar Chand of Kangra had captured and by giving her in addition a part of Sansar Chand's territory. A year later still, it was she who provided the extra grain of moral courage he needed to tip the scales in favour of his deciding to assume the title of Maharaja. Hardly had another year passed when she joined him in the capture of Amritsar.

The turning point came with the birth of twin sons, Sher Singh and Tara Singh, to Mehtab Kaur in 1808. Until then Sada Kaur had been content to play second fiddle and had been happy to see her ambitions taking shape in the increasing power and prestige of her son-in-law. The birth of sons to her daughter gave her new ideas. Ranjit Singh had already been presented with a son, Kharak Singh, by his second wife, Raj Kaur, in 1802. The question that began to worry Sada Kaur's mind was whether Kharak Singh or the elder of her daughter's twins, Sher Singh, would be chosen to succeed Ranjit Singh. The relations between Ranjit Singh and Mehtab Kaur being what they were and Kharak Singh being the eldest born, he was the obvious choice. Could she change that? In any case, it would be wise to strengthen her own position and that of her daughter and grandsons independently of the fortunes of the Sukerchakia family. She began by raiding the territory of her ancient enemies, the Ramgarhias, who sought Ranjit Singh's protection as his vassals. Ranjit Singh had to interfere and bring about an amicable settlement: and he had to do so more than once.

The rift widened when tribute was levied on Adinanagar, one of the estates of the Kanhayas. It was the general practice of the Durbar to make the various chiefdoms pay for their protection. How else was a central army to be maintained? Even the estates of the Maharaja's own mother and Prince Kharak Singh were not exempt from this, but Sada Kaur thought that her estates should enjoy complete exemption. The gift of Whadni near Ferozpur, instead of satisfying her as ample compensation, made her think that she was beyond the Durbar's jurisdiction when the English began to challenge Ranjit Singh's right to levy tribute or annex territories beyond the Sutlej. A month before Metcalfe came to negotiate a treaty with Ranjit Singh on this subject, Sada Kaur supported the Malwa sardars against the Maharaja. At a later stage, when the British began to make preparations for compelling Ranjit Singh to sign the treaty by a show of force, she was among the first to send word to them that they could count on her support. Later still, when Ochterlony actually advanced at the head of the British task force into the Malwa states, she was present with the Malwa sardars to greet him. Ranjit Singh forgave her all these things out of gratitude for what she had done for him in the beginning of his career. True she had embittered his domestic life with her intrigues; but she had meant well and she had so often been a source of courage and strength to him.

The breaking point was reached when Sada Kaur refused to attend the wedding of Kharak Singh in 1812 and even forbade Sher Singh and Tara Singh to attend it. Mehtab Kaur was by then dead and the boys were living with her; but instead of giving them enough to live upon decently, she would send them every now and again to their father with petitions for jagirs. When Ranjit Singh gave some small jagirs to Kharak Singh, Sada Kaur began to rail against him for partiality and to complain that he was letting Sher Singh and Tara

Singh live in penury. Ranjit Singh countered this by proposing that she should give half her estate to the princes, who were after all her only heirs. The wrangle continued until Ranjit Singh made up his mind to settle the problem once for all and proposed, in 1820, that she should make over the administration of her estates to Sher Singh, as she was then in her seventies and deserved some rest. This was the last thing she could agree to. So she decided to cross the Sutlej and go to the British to seek their protection. The excuse she put forward for the journey was that she was going to inspect her Whadni property. Hearing of this, Ranjit Singh invited her to come to Lahore and discuss with him the whole question of jagirs for her grandsons. She met Ranjit Singh in his camp at Shahdara and he was able to talk her into signing a document assigning the management of her estates to Sher Singh; but she had signed the document with a mental reservation and tried to escape to Batala to seek British help for stopping its execution. She was intercepted by Kharak Singh and brought back to Lahore, where she had to be put under house arrest. Sher Singh was put in charge of her estates; but she did not reconcile herself to this logical and inevitable dispensation to her dying day, to such an extent had the high ambition of her youth degenerated into senile avarice. From her confinement she sent a message to Ranjit Singh that she wished to be put to death rather than be deprived of her property. Ranjit Singh wept before the maidservant who had brought the message and said that Sada Kaur had been more than a mother to him. He appealed to the maidservant to make her mistress understand that what had been done was what she herself would have done if she had taken a reasonable view of things. The property would sooner or later have gone to her grandsons and it was necessary that they should learn to look after it before it actually became theirs.

Sada Kaur is remembered as one of the most high-spirited and capable women in Sikh history. Her contribution to the building of the Sikh nation would, however, have been much greater than it was if she had subordinated the interests of the Kanhaya misl or, to be more accurate, her own interests, to the larger interests of the Khalsa Durbar. Her mistake lay in failing to see that Ranjit Singh was not just a rival misldar but the symbol of the unity of the Sikh nation as a whole. If the Sikhs were to be unified, they had to have one leader and it was Ranjit Singh, and not she, who could fulfil that role. It was a sad failure of vision on her part to try to destroy the image she had done so much to build.

Chapter II

Brothers For Ever

Of all the men with whom Ranjit Singh exchanged turbans as a pledge of eternal brotherhood, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia was the closest to him. Heir to the prestige of the saintly Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who was the nearest thing to a king the Sikhs had ever had and who had led their combined forces against Ahmad Shah Abdali, he was among the first chiefs whose hand of friendship was grasped by the young Sukerchakia misldar. It was in no small measure to his influence that Ranjit Singh owed his selection to march at the head of the combined Sikh troops against Shah Zaman in 1796 and again in 1797. Soon after he had captured Lahore, in 1799, Ranjit Singh sent for Fateh Singh and enlisted him among his chief political and military advisers. The exchange of turbans took place a year later at Taran Taaran in the course of an impressive ceremony watched by thousands of people assembled from all parts of the Punjab to bathe in the sacred tank.

After the ceremony the two allies together captured Pindi Bhattian and Dhanni-Potohar, both of which were granted to Fateh Singh. They next proceeded jointly against Nizamuddin of Kasur. In 1802, Ranjit Singh, Fateh Singh and Sada Kaur marched side by side as victors into Amritsar.

The friendly relations between Ranjit Singh and Fateh Singh were put on an even firmer footing when they together signed the Treaty of Lahore with the British in 1806, under-

taking to see to the expulsion of Jaswant Rao Holkar's armies *60 miles* beyond Amritsar. In the same year Fateh Singh accompanied Ranjit Singh on his expedition to the south of the Sutlej and a year later to Jhang. These expeditions were followed by a joint campaign against Sialkot, Akhnur and Sheikhupura. Then came the visit of Metcalfe in 1808. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Dewan Mohkam Chand were sent to Kasur at the head of 2,000 horsemen to receive the English envoy at Kasur. Fateh Singh was present when the Treaty of Amritsar was signed in 1809. He also accompanied the Maharaja to Kangra in the same year and was left in charge of the defences of Lahore and Amritsar when the Maharaja marched to Multan in 1810. In the following year he accompanied Ranjit Singh on his visit to Shah Mahmud at Rawalpindi and later helped in the reduction of Sardar Budh Singh of Jullundur. In 1813 he fought alongside the Maharaja against Wazir Fateh Khan and took part in the Bahawalpur, Rajauri and Bhimbar campaigns. He was also present at the siege of Multan in 1818. During the Maharaja's Kashmir campaign in 1819, he once again remained in charge of Lahore. Two years later, he assisted the Maharaja in reducing the fort of Mankhera.

Suddenly in 1825 came the news like a bolt from the blue that Fateh Singh Ahluwalia had left Kapurthala and fled to Jagraon, across the Sutlej, with his whole family. What had happened to spoil a beautiful friendship — a friendship which had stood foursquare even to the winds of intrigue and hostility which had blown in the Treaty of Amritsar? As subsequent investigations showed, the source of the mischief was Fateh Singh's agent in Lahore, Chaudhri Kadir Bakhsh, who had been sending alarming reports to his master about the Durbar's designs on his estates. The reports falsely suggested that the estates would shortly be attached, as had happened to most other misls. Fortunately for the friendship,

the British were at that time anxious to remain on the right side of Ranjit Singh. In any case, they could not with any justification interfere in view of the Treaty of Amritsar. As far as Jagraon was concerned, it had been granted to Fateh Singh, on payment of a nazrana, by the Maharaja, who was, therefore, its overlord for the purposes of the British. As regards Fateh Singh's estates north of the Sutlej, British interference in them was precluded by the Treaty of Amritsar.

The British, therefore, advised Fateh Singh to rely on his friendship with the Maharaja and go back to his home north of the Sutlej. Ranjit Singh also sent his envoys to allay Fateh Singh's fears. At last Fateh Singh came back. He was received with full honours by Prince Nau Nihal Singh and Raja Dhian Singh. The two friends met once again. Fateh Singh unsheathed his sword, laid it at Ranjit Singh's feet and asked him to sever his head with his own hand for the act of infidelity of which he had been guilty. Ranjit Singh stood up from his seat, embraced his friend and returned his sword. There were tears in the eyes of both of them. Fateh Singh was given a robe of honour, an elephant with a silver howdah and a necklace of pearls.

His estates north of the Sutlej had been seized under the Maharaja's orders by Fakir Azizuddin — not too happily, because the Fakir had a great liking for this amiable man. Fakir Nuruddin was sent to deliver them back to Fateh Singh's officials, and there was no happier man in the whole of the Punjab at that moment than the Fakir.

Chapter III

An Embarrassing Admirer

Among those who helped Ranjit Singh in the capture of Amritsar in 1802 was a band of Akalis under the leadership of Phula Singh. While chiefdoms were being won and lost around them, these dedicated soldiers of the Khalsa — "immortals", as they genuinely believed themselves to be — devoted themselves to the care of Sikh shrines, with occasional sorties to the surrounding country to win their bread at the point of the sword. Their most dearly cherished dream was to see a Khalsa kingdom established; but they were not organized and equipped well enough to realize this dream themselves. They were, therefore, eagerly waiting for a man who could do so: they would place all their fanatical zeal and all their self-disciplined bravery at his service. They saw the lineaments of such a man for the first time in the youthful Ranjit Singh. When, therefore, after driving the Afghan invading armies away and making himself master of Lahore, he appeared before Amritsar, they were only too ready to strike a blow for him.

Phula Singh and his Akalis were difficult men to get on with. Their whole way of life was a paradox. On the one hand, they were humble and pious people, continually praying and doing menial jobs for the love of the Guru in the holy places and gurdwaras, on the other hand,

they believed that they were entitled to exact from the community whatever they needed for their upkeep. Their needs were not many and they seldom appropriated to themselves more than they needed; but what they needed they took by any means open to them. To serve a temporal master was against their creed. In fact, it was an article of faith with them to defy and prey upon the powerful and the rich, while serving and helping the poor and the weak. In the matter of religious doctrine and practice, they were uncompromisingly orthodox. While they were dreaded by the rich and the privileged, they enjoyed a good deal of popularity among the Sikh masses.

Phula Singh himself was a combination of the best and the worst features of the Akali character. His best quality was his dashing gallantry and his worst was his blind fanaticism. Ranjit Singh made use of both these qualities at the same time by throwing him and his Akalis into battle at critical moments in engagements against similar Muslim fanatics, as for example, at Kasur and at Nowshera. It, however, took Ranjit Singh some time to bring under control the other qualities of this strange man. One of these arose, paradoxically enough, from his very admiration for Ranjit Singh as the Sikh king of his dreams, and it was his impatience with any concessions made by Ranjit Singh to the exigencies of statecraft. It was Phula Singh who was the chief author of the fracas between Metcalfe's Muslim bodyguard and the Akalis at Amritsar, and his intention in provoking it was that the negotiations for the Treaty of Amritsar should break down, because he thought that Ranjit Singh would compromise his position as an independent ruler, if he signed the treaty. Little did he know that he was, in fact, hastening the treaty by his rash act. Worse than this was his habit of going on plundering sprees every now and again. This, again, arose from his misconception about the right of Akalis to defy lawful authority

and make direct exactions from the community. Ranjit Singh had to reprimand him repeatedly and make him return his acquisitions — that is, those of them which he had not already distributed among his followers or the poor. It was not until Ranjit Singh took him and his band of Akalis into his service and thus brought him under his direct control that his free-booting activities stopped.

Ranjit Singh treated Phula Singh both as an individual and as the leader of a movement, and he made good use of the difficult material that he was in both these capacities. As an individual he was a brave and brilliant soldier. As the leader of the Akali movement, he represented a force which, if not harnessed to the purposes of the state, could undermine its very foundations. It was a good piece of human relations work to make a proudly independent Akali leader accept royal service, and it was an equally clever achievement of state-craft to make the Akali movement serve the interests of the state. However, it cost Ranjit Singh a good deal of patience and tolerance to achieve these results. Akali Phula Singh was a particularly violent specimen of those Akalis who considered it their life's vocation to go about insulting people, and there were not a few occasions when he practised this upon Ranjit Singh until he had been tamed. He did not stop short of even at having an attempt made on Ranjit Singh's life, or at least making a show of one. Immediately after the Rupar meeting between Ranjit Singh and the British Governor-General, at which Ranjit Singh had been asked to desist from annexing any territories in Sindh, an Akali rushed towards Ranjit Singh with drawn sword. There was no need of questioning the man, after he had been overpowered, to find out whose was the master-mind behind him. Ranjit Singh at once under-stood that this was another demonstration of the fire-eating Akali leader's impatience with his compromises and of his

overzealous vindication of the Khalsa Durbar's prestige. Akali Phula Singh continued in the Maharaja's service until he met his death at Nowshera in the manner in which he had so often gone out to meet it.

Akali Phula Singh seems to have had some kind of a strange respect for the Fakir brothers. Not only did he spare them the indignities to which he used to subject big people simply for the fun of doing so, he even listened to mild rebukes from them, and this cannot have been from fear; for the man knew no fear and, in any case, he had nothing to fear from them. In fact, the Akalis as a class treated the Fakir brothers with respect after their own fashion and used to address them as "Babaji" or "Saeenji" — words which are used in addressing holy men. During the period before they were brought under control and when they used to indulge in occasional acts of extortion and freebooting, Fakir Nuruddin was stopped one day by a band of Akalis near the Shahidganj mosque in Landa Bazar and asked to pay them what they used to call a "gappha", a gift of money. Fakir Nuruddin mentions that they did so in a very respectful manner as if they were begging. He did not have much money on him and, therefore, asked them to call at his house. When they did so, he gave them two thousand rupees. The Maharaja got to know of the incident and had the men arrested and produced before him. He seemed to be so angry that the Fakir apprehended he would award them very severe punishments. To avoid creating bad blood, he submitted to the Maharaja that this was not a case of robbery or extortion, since he had given the money voluntarily. The Maharaja was visibly displeased at being frustrated in meting out the punishment which he thought the men deserved, but had to let them go. However, Nuruddin was amply repaid for his clemency — or sagacity: the Akalis never bothered him again.

Chapter IV

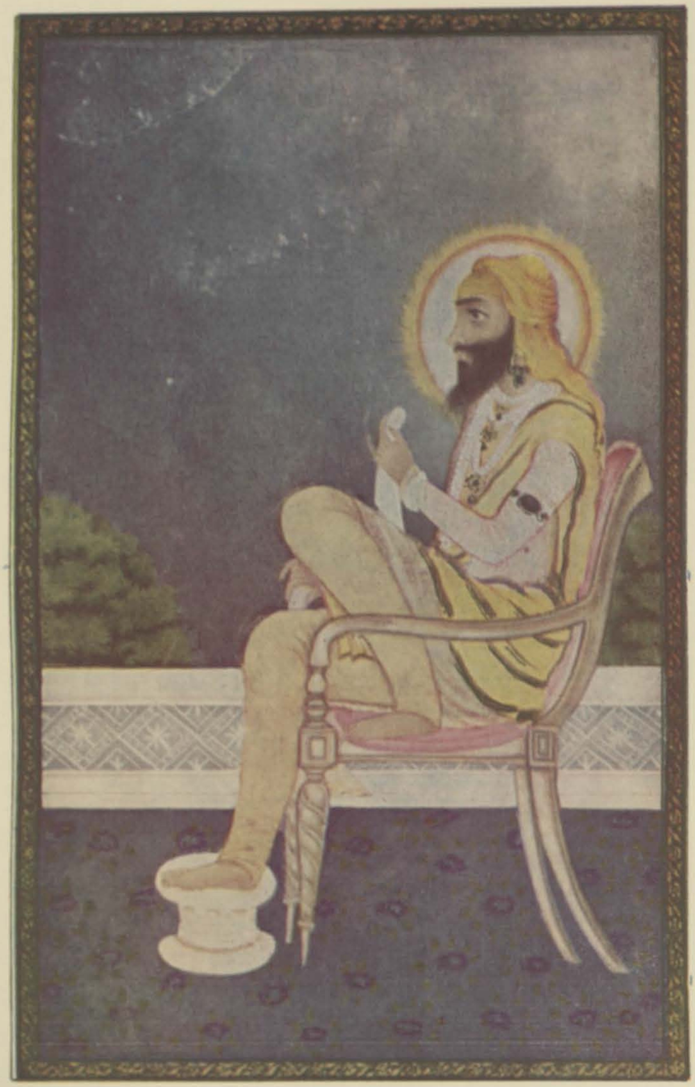
A Saint Manque

Raj Kaur, Ranjit Singh's second wife, triumphed over his first wife, Mehtab Kaur, by presenting him, in 1802, with his first son, who was named Kharak Singh on the advice of the astrologers. So great was the happiness of the Maharaja and his people at the birth of the heir-apparent that Lahore was *en fete* for several weeks. Robes of honour were bestowed on the Sardars of the Durbar and every soldier in the capital was given a necklace of gold. Large sums of money were distributed among the poor from the royal treasury.

The infant grew up into a good-natured and well-behaved boy. He learned the arts of war and was sent out on military expeditions — in the beginning for training, later on in nominal command and later still in actual command. He gave a creditable account of himself on all occasions, and it could be hoped that in the fulness of time he would grow into a reasonably good military leader. But he was simple-minded, gullible and mentally indolent. He left the management of his estates entirely in the hands of his tutor, Bhaia Ram Singh, a Brahmin convert from Meerut who, having originally joined the Maharaja's bodyguard, had rapidly risen to prominence with the help of his brother, Jamadar Khushal Singh, the Maharaja's *deorhidar* (Lord Chamberlain). Reports of mismanagement and irregularities on the part of Ram Singh soon began to be brought to the Maharaja. He dropped gentle hints to the Prince and asked him to take a little more interest in his private affairs. The

Prince was, however, so much in the hands of Ram Singh that all these admonitions were wasted upon him. At last, in 1816, the Maharaja lost his patience and ordered the arrest of Ram Singh on a charge of embezzlement. Ram Singh went on protesting his innocence and his inability to pay the amount he had been held accountable for. The Maharaja sent for Kharak Singh and informed him in open court that he was going to appoint another man, Dewan Radha Ram, in Ram Singh's place. Kharak Singh pleaded for the release and reinstatement of Ram Singh, claiming that he was speaking for his mother. The Maharaja told the Prince to explain the position to his mother and obtain her consent.

On the following day, Maharani Raj Kaur appeared in court and was questioned on the subject. She left the matter to the Maharaja's discretion. Bhaia Ram Singh, however, subsequently made good the missing money and was allowed to resume the management of Kharak Singh's estates on his providing a cash security for the regular payment of the *nazrana* due to the Durbar. The *nazrana* nevertheless fell into arrears more than once and had to be realized by coercive measures. The manner in which it was realized on a particular occasion in respect of Kharak Singh's Sheikhupura jagir illustrates how little ties of blood or other personal factors influenced Ranjit Singh in the matter of realizing Durbar revenues. The occasion was the death of Maharani Raj Kaur. Hardly was her cremation over when Durbar troops went to Sheikhupura and invested Kharak Singh's fort there. Kharak Singh had it conveyed to the Maharaja through his servant, Ilahia, that this action had aggrieved him very much, as he was in mourning for his mother. The Maharaja sent the reply that the action had been taken exactly because the Prince was in mourning and might not, therefore, be able to look after his estate. He, however, added that, if the Prince could furnish a written undertaking to pay



Prince Kharak Singh

5 lakhs of rupees — presumably the amount due from him —, the Durbar troops would be recalled.

Prince Kharak Singh was utterly lacking in ambition and worldly sense. His real interest lay in praying, reading the Granth and sitting with legs folded and head bowed in the company of holy men. Perhaps he was a throw-back to one of his ancestors in the time of the earlier Gurus — that is, before they became soldiers of fortune and adventures. There was a religious strain in Ranjit Singh's character too; but it was kept in check by the more dominant practical strain. In the case of Kharak Singh the practical strain had no stimulus to keep it active and in time became defunct. His lack of spirit and his simple-mindedness were a source of great anxiety to Ranjit Singh, because he knew that his successor would need qualities of another order to cope with the forces that his death would release.

Kharak Singh's simple-mindedness seems to have bordered on imbecility, as would appear from some incidents narrated in the author's family papers in which he figures. Two of these are reproduced below:

One day Ranjit Singh was admonishing Kharak Singh to learn to look after his private affairs so that he could fit himself to succeed him on the throne. To demonstrate how fast that event was approaching, he pointed to his beard and said, "Look at my grey beard, my son." The heir-apparent stepped forward, took the Maharaja's beard in his hand, closely examined it, and exclaimed, "By God, it has gone all grey." This was in private audience; but there were courtiers present. One of them was Fakir Azizuddin, who mentions how horrified he was. As regards the Maharaja himself, Azizuddin says that there came a profoundly sad look into his face. What room was there for royal or

paternal anger in dealing with an infantile intelligence of this order?

On another occasion, while Prince Kharak Singh was inspecting the royal stables in the company of Fakir Nuruddin under royal command, a horse passed by. Turning to the keeper of the stable, the Prince asked, "Isn't this the horse that was killed in the battle of Nowshera?" "Yes, Your Highness, it is," promptly replied the quick-witted stable-keeper.

Kharak Singh's succession to the throne remained problematic for a long time, especially because of the Maharaja's dissatisfaction with his management of his estates; but the Bhaia Ram Singh affair proved a blessing in disguise for him. On one of the occasions when the Maharaja questioned the Prince on the subject, he lost his temper with him and told him to get out of his sight. The Prince took this to heart and avoided appearing in court for a long time. The Maharaja's ministers, especially Azizuddin, interceded on the Prince's behalf and advised the Maharaja to do something to make amends for the Prince's loss of face. The Maharaja decided to swallow the bitter pill, do what appeared to be the right thing and leave the consequences to fate. Accordingly, on September 27, 1816, a grand Durbar was held, at which the Maharaja put the saffron mark of succession on Kharak Singh's forehead. Even this did not matter entirely. Speculation remained rife until Ranjit Singh's last moments as to whether Kharak Singh or Sher Singh would succeed him. The stakes were even between the rivals. Kharak Singh was the eldest son, connected through his mother with the Nakkais and through his wife with the Kanhayas of Fatehgarh, and backed by the majority of the sardars and the army as the rightful heir. If he was not admired for his intelligence or ability or even his appearance,

he was liked for his simplicity and piety. Sher Singh had a finer appearance, a quicker intelligence and a more impressive bearing. The Dogra group, led by Raja Dhian Singh, the Prime Minister, was supposed to be backing him. His chief disadvantage was that there were doubts about his parentage. Mehtab Kaur, rumour had it, had not given birth either to him or to his alleged twin brother, Tara Singh, but had bought both of them and foisted them upon the Maharaja. Ranjit Singh had acknowledged both the boys; but the general impression was that he had done so only to save appearances. In any case, Sher Singh's connection with the Kanhayas through his real or supposed mother, Mehtab Kaur, was not much of an asset for him owing to the strained relations between Ranjit Singh and Mehtab Kaur's mother, Sada Kaur.

Ranjit Singh's deathbed decision — taken on the advice of Fakir Azizuddin — that Kharak Singh should succeed him with Dhian Singh as his Prime Minister was the best compromise practicable. Kharak Singh was the rightful heir, and he needed Dhian Singh's guidance and support. In the event, this strange association did not work. The simple-minded Kharak Singh succumbed to court intrigues, allowed himself to be deposed and imprisoned within four months of his accession and was slowly poisoned to death in another year's time. Fakir Azizuddin speaks of these events with profound sorrow and says that, if he could have foreseen them, he would not have given the advice he gave to Ranjit Singh about the succession. But one wonders what other advice he could have honestly given in the circumstances.

Chapter V

The Legendary Laili

One of Ranjit Singh's ruling passions was his love for horses. He had more than twelve hundred of them in his stables, of which as many as a thousand were reserved for him personally. He took great care of them and used to inspect them almost daily. Riding was his favourite exercise, and he would make time for it even on the busiest day. Two horses were, therefore, always kept close to wherever he might be, saddled, bridled and all ready to be mounted. Not seldom, when anything annoyed or worried him, he would abruptly adjourn court, call for a horse and go for a long ride. This used to be an indication that something big or unusual was in the offing. He sometimes used to say that where he felt surest of himself was in the saddle, and so he often took important decisions on horseback. He did not give up riding till his last illness. After successive paralytic strokes had made it impossible for him to mount a horse unaided, he would have himself lifted into the saddle. Once there, he could look after himself, because he was a born rider.

The vanity he lacked in regard to his own appearance he made up for in regard to the appearance of his horses. They were decked out in the most expensive and gorgeous trappings — bridles and saddles overlaid with gold and studded with precious stones, strings of jewels round the neck, including the Koh-i-Noor itself on special state occasions, and gold bangles round the ankles. The jewels and ornaments of his horses were worth as much as fifty lakhs of rupees.

There was hardly a horse among those reserved for him which had been purchased for less than twenty thousand rupees. Most of the horses were of local breeds, but quite a few of them were Persian, for example, Gauharbar, Sufaid Pari and Laili. There was a small number of thoroughbred Arabs too.

The Maharaja was always on the look-out for new additions to his stables and he was always ready to compound cash tribute for horses. In fact, whenever he took any new territory, his first demand was horses, especially if the territory had a well-known breed or if the chief was reputed to have a good stable. It was a standing joke among the courtiers that, if there were enough good horses to compound the total tribute due to the Durbar, the Maharaja would accept the whole lot of them and then tap other sources to raise money or have to sell horses to keep his government going. Nobody could, however, reason with him on this subject; even Azizuddin and Nuruddin do not seem to have dared to do so. He was like a wayward child where horses were concerned.

The things he did to acquire the Persian horse Laili are strange enough to read like a fairy tale. Not content with this, some unsympathetic historians have twisted them and woven them into a weird tale of cruelty and extortion. According to the author's family papers the true facts are as narrated below:—

Sometime in 1822 the Maharaja heard that one of the Barakzai brothers — either Dost Muhammad or Yar Muhammad — had a beautiful Persian horse, named Laili. It was, however, not known whether the horse was at Kabul or at Peshawar. When, in 1823, Fakir Azizuddin visited Peshawar to collect tribute from Yar Muhammad, the presents



Maharaja Ranjit Singh on "Asp-i-Laila"

given to him for the Maharaja included a number of horses; but Laili was not one of them. Azizuddin had been instructed by Ranjit Singh to inquire about Laili and, if possible, to acquire it; but Yar Muhammad pretended that Laili was not in his possession and Azizuddin took him at his word. A year or two later information was received that the horse was actually in Yar Muhammad's possession. The Maharaja offered to buy it, but was told that it was dead. The Maharaja had reliable information that the horse was alive and in Yar Muhammad's possession. Further negotiations were, therefore, discreetly conducted, but with the same result. Ultimately, in 1828, the Maharaja's patience was exhausted and he sent a force under Budh Singh Sandhawalia with the dual object of nipping in the bud new trouble threatened by the tribesmen and acquiring Laili from Yar Muhammad. Budh Singh was killed; but the battle was won by the Durbar troops. However, when Generals Allard and Ventura, who were with Budh Singh, dealt with Yar Muhammad for having secretly helped the tribesmen, Laili was not among the horses that he presented to them for the Maharaja. The Generals demanded Laili, but were told that it was dead. They, therefore, took Yar Muhammad's brother as a hostage. The Maharaja was not satisfied with this and sent a further force to Peshawar under Kharak Singh's command to acquire Laili by whatever means possible — by purchase, by threat, by force or even by the deposition of Yar Muhammad. Before, however, Kharak Singh could reach Peshawar, Yar Muhammad had been defeated and slain in an uprising of the tribesmen and his brother, Sultan Muhammad, had fled.

In 1830, when Sultan Muhammad was installed as Governor by Prince Sher Singh and General Ventura, Laili was again asked for. Sultan Muhammad hemmed and hawed as Yar Muhammad had done, and it was not until Ventura had arrested him in his own palace that

he delivered the horse. It was carried off to Lahore as a valuable trophy of war and received there with great joy.

The traveller Baron Charles Hugel quotes Ranjit Singh as having told him that Laili had cost him sixty lakhs of rupees and 12,000 of his soldiers; but a child's evaluation of its doll or a collector's evaluation of a rare object of art he had acquired should never be taken seriously. Besides, all the military operations during which Laili's acquisition was attempted were not intended solely for him. Some historians even doubt if Ranjit Singh actually acquired the Laili he had been after, because Laili is a feminine name in common use, whereas the animal that went under that name in Ranjit Singh's stables was a male. Azizuddin and Nuruddin do not explain this apparent discrepancy, but seem to have no doubt that the horse which Ranjit Singh acquired was the famous Laili of the Barakzai stables, whose name was a legend in the whole of Persia and Afghanistan. Whatever may have been the truth, Ranjit Singh was happy with his acquisition and used to take a special pride in exhibiting it to his foreign visitors. Azizuddin and Nuruddin also speak of it in glowing terms. They describe its colour as dark grey, which also does not agree with the meaning of the word "*Laili*", that is to say, black. But, here again, they offer no explanation. The identity, the sex and the colour of Laili must, therefore, remain a mystery. As against this triple mystery, the more famous Laili — the legendary beloved of Majnun, the archetypal mad lover of Arabic, Persian and Urdu poetry — can claim only a single mystery, namely, the question of her complexion. The general belief is that she was as black as night, as her name suggests.. To Majnun, however, she appeared as fair as dawn. Hence the famous Persian proverb, "*Laili should be seen with Majnun's eyes.*" We, for our part, cannot do better than try to visualize Ranjit Singh's Laili as he saw him or her.

CHAPTER VI

The Bungalow On Wheels

One of the marvels of Ranjit Singh's palace was a bungalow on wheels with silver walls and a shawl canopy for a roof and furnished with carpets, cushions, curtains and multi-coloured chandeliers. It was pulled by eight elephants and stood so much higher than the ground that one had to use a ladder to ascend it or descend from it. The royal children and their playmates used to go for joyrides in it on festive occasions, and what made this a special treat for them was the fact that, having no springs, it jolted them enough to give them the feeling of riding eight elephant chariots at a time, one for each elephant that pulled it. The Maharaja was often personally present to organize and inaugurate the joyride, and it was always an amusing spectacle to see the Lion of the Punjab employing all his skills of statesmanship, diplomacy and generalship to deal with this most difficult sample of his subjects, this human material in the making. The children of the Fakir family used to be among the holiday-makers, and the author's family papers contain some first-hand accounts of these royally supervised joyrides and reminiscences of direct encounters with the Maharaja.

Ranjit Singh was very fond of children, especially good-looking and intelligent ones, and delighted in being surrounded by them, playing with them and exchanging little jokes with them, whenever he could find time for this.

The royal children even enjoyed the freedom of the private durbar, and it was not an unusual thing for the smaller ones among them to toddle or crawl about or even climb over the Maharaja. Most foreign visitors to his court have mentioned this, either with approval as a mark of his humanity or with disapproval as a sign of lack of order. But since even in his most relaxed moments Ranjit Singh's mind was always, consciously or subconsciously, planning the future of his kingdom, he utilized his contacts with the children of his courtiers and sardars for picking out promising boys from among them. These boys were brought up under his personal supervision, taught to read and write, instructed in riding and in the use of arms and, as they grew up, assigned increasingly important duties. In this way he recruited many young men to serve him, and some of them rose to high positions in the army or in the civil administration. Among these were some children of the Fakir family. The most prominent of them all, however, was Hira Singh, the son of Raja Dhian Singh.

Hira Singh was born in 1818, when his father replaced Jamadar Khushal Singh as Deorhidar, establishing himself in a short time as Prime Minister and, with Fakir Azizuddin, the most important figure in the Durbar. Hira Singh was thus brought up right under the Maharaja's eye. Not only because he was the Prime Minister's son, but also because he was an exceptionally good-looking, bright and winsome child, he engaged the Maharaja's special attention all along. Being an apt pupil, he soon began to excel all other boys in riding, swordsmanship and musketry. Added to this was a certain pertness and quickwittedness about the boy which particularly pleased the Maharaja. He thus became the Maharaja's special favourite. When he was about 8 or 9 years old, his father began to bring him occasionally to the court. There also he conducted himself in an excellent manner, quietly

watching the proceedings but coming out with apt remarks, whenever invited or permitted by the Maharaja to speak. He offered a pleasing contrast to the Maharaja's own sons, Kharak Singh and Sher Singh. Kharak Singh was not only plain-looking and dull-witted, but was also farouche and felt ill at ease in the court. He was, therefore, never there except under compulsion. Besides, he was most of the time out in the field or on his own estates. Sher Singh was good-looking and manly, but did not distinguish himself by his wit or wisdom. Again, he also was most of the time away from Lahore — either with his grandmother, Sada Kaur, or on some campaign or other. The Maharaja, therefore, began to like the presence of Hira Singh in his court.

There came a time when Hira Singh began to be given a seat in the Durbar by the Maharaja's side along with the two Princes, Kharak Singh and Sher Singh. Since the Princes were mostly absent, this evolved in practice into his being the sole occupant of a chair by the Maharaja's side. In full Durbar, where the Ministers, Councillors and Sardars used to take their seats in order of rank, Hira Singh's special seat acquired a princely importance. In private audience this led to a situation which has caused so much comment on the part of foreign visitors. Hira Singh used to be seated by the Maharaja's side, while his father, the Prime Minister, stood behind the Maharaja with folded hands. There was nothing in this which need have shocked or surprised anybody. Hira Singh was for Ranjit Singh a trinket, a pet, a flower, an emblem of his childish delight in bright, colourful and lively things. He was also Ranjit Singh's compensation for his disappointment in his own sons. He saw in him what he would have liked Kharak Singh and Sher Singh to be. Perhaps he also saw in him what he would have himself liked to have been when he was his age.

Hira Singh grew up precociously into a strikingly handsome youngster with bright eyes, a ready wit and a fine bearing, an excellent horseman, a dashing soldier and a polished courtier — a combination of qualities inherited by him from his father and those imparted to him by the training he had received at Ranjit Singh's hands. In 1828, when he was hardly ten, he was given the title of Raja, with a jagir to live up to it, and the command of several regiments. Ranjit Singh now began to think of finding a bride for him. Anirodh Chand, son of Ranjit Singh's old ally and adversary, Sansar Chand, chief of Kangra, who was now dead, happened to visit Lahore with two of his beautiful sisters. Ranjit Singh sought the hand of one of the girls for Hira Singh. Anirodh Chand, scion of a very old and proud family, looked down upon Hira Singh as an upstart and, therefore, did not welcome this proposal. Giving a noncommital reply, he left to attend the wedding of the son of Fateh Singh Ahluwalia; but negotiations were re-opened through two Hindu Sardars, and Anirodh sent a written agreement to give the hand of one of the girls. He had, however, not consulted his mother. When she came to know of the proposal, she flew into a rage and, taking her daughters with her, went over to British territory. Anirodh Chand soon joined her there and gave away both his sisters in marriage to the Raja of Tehri-Garhwal. Ranjit Singh then found a bride for Hira Singh in another family of a less proud descent and the marriage was celebrated in 1829 with great pomp befitting the marriage of the Maharaja's adopted son; for that was what Hira Singh had, in fact, become.

In the game of musical chairs that was played for ten years after Ranjit Singh's death, Hira Singh installed himself in the Prime Minister's chair in 1843, only to lose it after a year along with his clever but pampered head, which was cut off by the Khalsa army and hung up over one of the main gates of Lahore. The Fakir children, Hira Singh's playmates in the festal chariot, enjoyed careers of a different order.



Raja Hira Singh

They kept their heads and carried them on their shoulders into the British period along with their jobs — jobs no less useful, if less imposing, than Hira Singh's. They had sounder hearts to guide their heads. They also had Azizuddin and Nuruddin to prevent them from getting involved in the dangerous game of court intrigues.

Chapter VII

Pigeons, Blind Women And Tigers

While Ranjit Singh loved pageantry, jewellery, sumptuous clothes (even if on other people's persons), spirited horses and magnificently caparisoned elephants, there was another side to his nature which cared for humbler and gentler things. Children were on the borderline; for, though he was fond of all children, he was partial to good-looking and intelligent ones. In the matter of pets, however, he made no such distinction. His pets were little homely creatures like tame pigeons and domestic fowls. It used to give a mild shock of surprise to his foreign visitors, and perhaps a less mild one to the lordlier people among his Sardars, to be ushered into his presence while he was feeding the palace pigeons and fowls with his own hand. The spectacle of a man covered with a flock of pigeons, flying over his head, perching on his shoulders and pecking at his hand, or a brood of chickens running around him, scurrying about and fighting with each other over the crumbs thrown to them — this spectacle was different from the picture they had in their minds' eye of the great Maharaja. Bahadur Shah, last of the Mughal Emperors, once sent him some fan-tail pigeons and performing monkeys. They were received with no less joy than costly presents of jewellery, robes of honour and horses — even horses — used to be received. Some additions were made to their repertoire of skills under the personal supervision of the Maharaja,

and performances by them used to be among the entertainments to which special visitors were treated.

It is significant that Ranjit Singh kept no eagles or hawks, which it was fashionable for big men in those days to display on their hands or wrists as a symbol of manliness and power. Even in hunting hares Ranjit Singh's main objective used to be to give an opportunity to his greyhounds to exercise their limbs. The horsemen accompanying the greyhounds had strict orders never to chase and run down a hare. If Azizuddin prayed silently for the safe escape of the hares while they were being chased by the greyhounds, Ranjit Singh did not yield the palm to this gentle mystic in soft-heartedness. Should he happen to hear a fowl scream or a goat bleat piteously when caught for being slaughtered, the Maharaja would at once order its release. The royal cooks, therefore, had to take good care to avoid this.

This responsiveness to cries of distress often led to curious incidents during the royal progress through the streets of the city. It was all right for people to stop the Maharaja by shouting, "Dohai Sarkar", in order to lay genuine complaints before him: this was a routine affair. But sometimes people used to stop him with this cry for all sorts of fanciful things. One of these was to touch his body. Some of the people who wanted to touch him literally believed that his touch had the power of turning base metal to gold. One such person was a blind old woman, who, after she had stopped the Maharaja with the usual cry of distress and been led up to him, lifted a brass cooking pot she was carrying, and before anybody could intervene, rubbed it all over his clothes, besmearing them with soot and grease. She had probably been in her kitchen when the royal procession had approached and had run out with the cooking pot without cleaning it.

The royal attendants rushed up to her, pulled her away and tried to snatch the pot from her hand. The Maharaja stopped them and, bending down to the blind woman, said, "Old mother, why did you do this? Do you know you have spoilt my clothes?" "Maharaj," cried the woman, "have my head cut off for spoiling your clothes, but please don't let them take away my cooking pot. It must have turned to gold." "Yes, old mother," said the Maharaja, "it has turned to gold and nobody will take it away from you." Then he had the pot filled with gold coins and ordered that two court messengers should carry it to the old woman's house. It transpired on inquiry that the old woman was a poor widow, who had lost her only son, and who, therefore, deserved at least some of the gold she had been given.

Ranjit Singh's clemency sometimes took strange forms. In the course of hare hunts it happened now and again that a tiger hiding in the jungle was surprised. The Maharaja's orders were that, except in rare circumstances — when, for example, a single man found himself unexpectedly confronted with a tiger — firearms should not be used. Tigers were to be killed only by being surrounded by a number of men armed with spears and lances and swords. The Maharaja used to say that it was cowardly and unfair to shoot a tiger because he had no weapons with which to retaliate from a distance. Those who distinguished themselves in this dangerous sport were recruited by the Maharaja to good posts in the army. One night, the hunters came upon a tiger cub, captured it and put it in a cage, which was placed near the Maharaja's tent. Later in the night the Maharaja heard a continual rustle in the reeds near his tent as if some creature were moving about in them, and this was accompanied by an intermittent sound resembling the moaning of a cat. The Maharaja sent for one of the shikaris and asked him to listen to the sounds. The shikari listened and opined that this was the cub's mother

who probably wanted to get to him. The Maharaja ordered the release of the cub. "Even a tigress is a mother," he remarked. The shikari remonstrated and proposed that the tigress should be permitted to come to the cub and should then be captured or killed; but Ranjit Singh silenced him with a look.

Chapter VIII

Unequal Sweethearts, Equal Wives

If there was one thing in which Ranjit Singh failed to excel or even equal the average monarch of Oriental history, it was the size of his harem. It comprised forty-six women belonging to four categories. In the first category were nine whom he married in the orthodox Sikh manner. The second category also consisted of nine, all of them widows, whom he adopted as his wives by casting his mantle over them, as sanctioned by custom. To the third category belonged seven courtesans. All these categories enjoyed the status of queens. Not so the fourth category, which consisted of concubines.

While it was only human for Ranjit Singh to like some of these women more than the others, he was equally kind and considerate to all of them. Even the haughty Mehtab Kaur, his first wife, who had rejected his approaches as a youthful bridegroom and had gone away to her paternal home, continued to receive from him until her death such affection as she was willing to accept during the occasional visits they paid each other. He could not otherwise have acknowledged Sher Singh and Tara Singh as his sons, irrespective of whether they were actually such or not.

While there must have been mutual jealousies and intrigues among the ladies of the harem — in what household, whether royal or common, do they not exist? — there

is no evidence in the author's family papers of any conflict or quarrel which became a public scandal or which openly involved the Maharaja or any of his courtiers and sardars. This was due to the unfailing tact and impartiality of Ranjit Singh. He had his occasional love affairs; but even in the thick of them he never neglected any of his wives. If there was any person who was in a position to know all about what happened in the royal harem, that person was Fakir Nuruddin, who was in charge of all affairs relating to the Maharaja's palaces. Due allowance being made for his reticence, it is remarkable that there exists in his papers hardly any account or mention of anything scandalous that happened in the harem. In fact, the author's family papers do not contain much of interest about Ranjit Singh's wives and sweethearts. Whatever little they do is reproduced below.

One day, a personal servant of Prince Sher Singh presented himself to the Maharaja's second wife, Raj Kaur, mother of Prince Kharak Singh, with the message that his master sought permission to pay his filial respects to her, or "to touch her feet" as the custom was. "God preserve my own son, Kharak Singh, and his son, Nau Nihal Singh," said Raj Kaur angrily, "why should I let that son of a washerman touch my feet? Go and tell him that he cannot get himself accepted as the Maharaja's son by tricks of this kind." Fakir Nuruddin was present. On hearing this, he said to Raj Kaur, "Maharani, you should not utter proud words like these. They do not please God." Raj Kaur laughed the matter away. Soon after that she suddenly died, followed shortly by Ranjit Singh himself. Within less than two years, Kharak Singh and Nau Nihal Singh died on the same day.

Kharak Singh was stricken with grief at his mother's death. The Maharaja sent him a number of doshalas and lengths of gold and silver brocade, which were carried by a



Maharani Nakkain

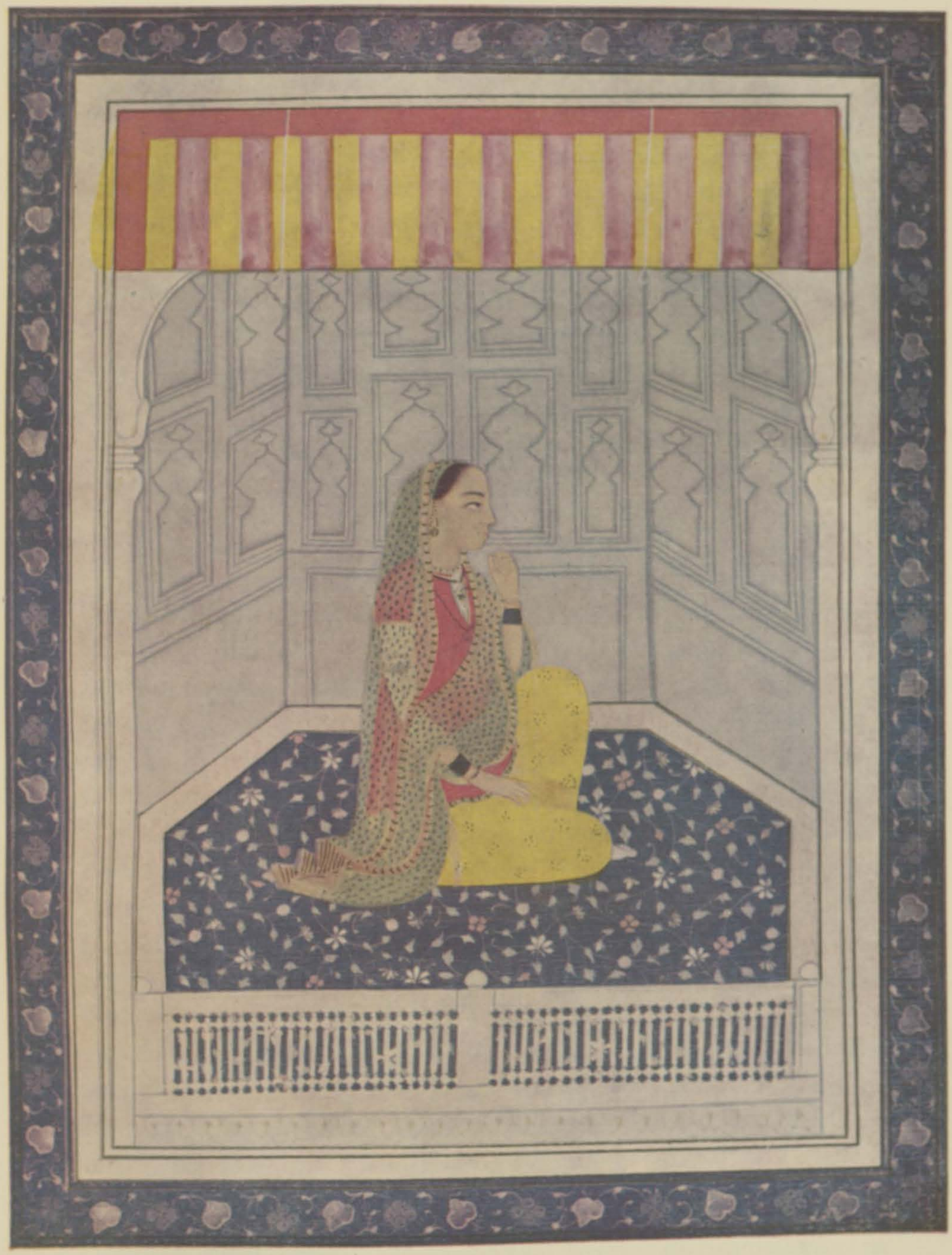
deputation of the principal sardars and courtiers. The funeral of the Maharani was performed with great ceremony and her body was cremated in her own garden outside Bhati Gate in Lahore. The Maharaja was so shocked by the news of the Maharani's sudden death that he said angrily in court, "So death has struck a blow at the royal family, too." This was the first time that Fakir Nuruddin had heard him utter a blasphemy, and he shuddered to hear it.

Nuruddin speaks with particular regard, approaching admiration, of two daughters of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra whom Ranjit Singh married after an expedition conducted especially for their sake. The elder one of these was called Mehtab Devi but was better known as Guddan, while the younger one was called Raj Banso. The latter committed suicide by taking opium, and the former burnt herself as a *sati* on Ranjit Singh's funeral pyre. Raj Banso's suicide took place in circumstances which caused Ranjit Singh more than ordinary grief. The Maharaja occasionally used to hold a Durbar of his maharanis. At one of these Durbars, he asked a dancing girl, named Allah Jowai, which of his maharanis she thought to be the most beautiful. Allah Jowai hesitated to reply, because by doing so she would offend all the maharanis but one. The Maharaja, however, insisted on her replying and put her under an oath. Thus cornered, she pointed to Raj Banso and said, "This Maharani is the moon and the others the stars of your harem." "Perhaps you are right," remarked Ranjit Singh, "but don't you think that Moran Sarkar is just as beautiful as Maharani Raj Banso?" Being bracketed by her husband with an ex-courtesan so deeply wounded the pride of the blue-blooded Rajput princess that, as soon as she returned to her bed-chamber, she took a large dose of opium, lay down in her bed and never woke up again. The Maharaja was stricken with great grief and remorse and performed her cremation with

his own hands on a costly pyre of sandalwood. He very rarely held durbars of his maharanis after that.

The next maharani about whom Nuruddin has something interesting to say is Gul Bahar Begum, a courtesan of Lahore. She combined beauty with wit and wisdom, and the Maharaja often profited by her advice on complicated questions. She was fond of exhibiting herself in public and often went out riding on the same elephant with the Maharaja. Having no issue of her own, she adopted a Muslim boy, whose progeny is still living in Lahore. She also built a mosque, which is still extant. After the annexation of the Punjab, the British Government paid her a pension of twelve thousand rupees a year until her death in 1863.

Ranjit Singh's favourite queen, however, was Moran, a dancing girl of Amritsar, with whom he fell violently in love at first sight when he was twenty-two. Before he could win her father's consent to her marrying him, he had to agree to a rather awkward condition. It was customary among the families of courtesans in Amritsar for the bridegroom to build, light and blow ablaze with his own breath a fire in his father-in-law's house. Moran's father, boggling at the idea of marrying his daughter outside his class, made the observance of this custom a condition, hoping that it would frighten the royal suitor away. Ranjit Singh unhesitatingly accepted the condition. It was, however, actually fulfilled in the house of Moran's godfather, Mian Samdu, a wealthy citizen of Amritsar, instead of in her father's house. The wedding was celebrated with great eclat. The bridegroom's party, which formed a procession of elephants, horses, palkis and people on foot stretching from Lahore Fort to the Shalamar Garden, a distance of several miles, went all the way to Amritsar. The bride was given away by Mian Samdu with a dowry of several lakhs of rupees worth of jewellery, clothes and household effects, as if she had been a princess.



Moran Sarkar

Moran was not only the most beautiful — with Raj Banso and perhaps also Guddan — but also the stateliest of Ranjit Singh's queens. She was the only one in whose name Ranjit Singh struck a coin. The coin bore the figure of a peacock in keeping with the queen's name, which is the plural of the Punjabi word for that bird and which she acquired because of her style of dancing. There is a mosque named after her near the Mati Chowk in Lahore. There is also a village in the district of Amritsar which bears her name. She did not subscribe to the custom of the veil and used to appear unveiled in public along with the Maharaja like Maharani Gul Bahar Begum and unlike the other maharanis, who observed strict purdah.

With a poet's interest in affairs of the heart, Fakir Azizuddin recalls several occasions when Ranjit Singh confessed to him or to other members of his immediate circle how dearly he loved Moran. One such confession, evoked by the sight of Lord William Bentinck helping Lady Bentinck off the boat when they arrived for the Rupar meeting in 1831, is recorded even by Sohan Lal in his Umdat-ut-Tawarikh. "The Maharaja said that at that moment he was reminded of Bibi Moran, for he had exactly the same kind of love and unity with her and could not bear separation from her even for a moment." And yet Moran is not known to have played any prominent part in the politics of the court of Ranjit Singh. Nor is any other woman. It was only after Ranjit Singh's death that the Court of Lahore became a hotbed of feminine intrigue. It is, therefore, difficult to see the justice of opinions like the one expressed in the passage quoted below from Sir Lepel Griffin's "Ranjit Singh":—

"Like most men who have been distinguished in history for administrative vigour and military genius, Ranjit

Singh was very susceptible to feminine influence." Yes, he was susceptible to feminine influence, but as a man and not as a ruler: this was one sphere in which he managed to keep these two capacities apart.



Maharani Guddan

Chapter IX

On The Borderline

On the borderline between Ranjit Singh's harem and his court, between his private and his public life, there was a no man's land, a land of wine and song and dance. It was here that he used to spend his hours of relaxation — an evening once or twice a week with late-night variations when there was a festival or a special state occasion. Some hostile critics have described this as debauchery; but the fact is that there was little of debauchery in the way he used to spend his time in the company of his singing and dancing girls. He loved singing and dancing for their own sake and took a connoisseur's interest in them. The performances, therefore, used to be displays of art and not the orgies of dissipation which some people have imagined them to be. The Maharaja would sit apart, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by guests — he had no particular boon companions. He would drink his special wine, an extract of raisins with ground pearls mixed in it, watching the performance and occasionally applauding or asking some performer to come up and receive a gift of money at his hands. Being fond of repartee and *badinage*, he would now and again engage in a wordy duel with some particularly vivacious girl; and usually such a one served as cup-bearer. There was, however, never any coarseness or vulgarity in the process. The singing and dancing soirees thus used to be quite sober and dignified affairs. Quite often the Maharaja even conducted state business

during the soirees. In fact, people with whom he had something to discuss in private were sometimes invited to them so that he could talk to them quietly.

Some writers have tried to magnify the battles of his Amazons, which used to be waged on special occasions, into bacchanalian revelry; but they were nothing of the kind. For all their excitement, they were mere innocent frolic without any abandon or impropriety. Ranjit Singh seldom let himself go. Even when he did so, he never became a barbarian or a profligate. Illiterate as he was, he had acquired a degree of refinement from his association with persons of culture and learning, such as the Fakir brothers, and was always on his guard against lapses from the royal standards he had been told of. As regards the singing and dancing girls, they mostly came from professional families with generations of training behind them to perform in royal courts and aristocratic assemblies and a rigorous code of etiquette of their own to observe. Those of them who came from other sources were given the necessary training. Western visitors, unfamiliar with the oriental institution of professional singing and dancing girls, seem to have allowed their imagination to be led astray by occasional departures from traditional observances witnessed or heard of by them. In particular, they seem to have lost sight of the occasion: for example, Holi is a festival which is celebrated by all and sundry by a free-for-all of colour splashing, and the use of bows and arrows with heads of balls of coloured powder was merely a refinement.

The royal troupe consisted of a hundred and twenty-five girls chosen for their good looks from all over the Maharaja's domains. They remained members of the troupe generally upto the age of twenty-five, after which they were given to the Maharaja's officers as a favour or a reward for

good work. At one time the *prima donna* was a girl known as Bashiran, whom the Maharaja, because of her brown eyes resembling those of a cat, used to call "*Billo*," the nearest English equivalent of which is "Tabby". She was the Maharaja's special favourite and had a jagir of eight thousand rupees a year given to her, double the jagirs given to the other girls. She had musical talent of a high order and her *forte* was singing *ghazals* from the Diwan of Hafiz. One day, the Maharaja, in a playful mood, offered to give her jewellery worth fifteen thousand rupees and a further jagir of four thousand rupees a year if she could win the affections of Fakir Nuruddin. "No, thank you, Maharaj," said Billo in a scandalised tone. "Do you want me to be stricken blind for looking with sinful eyes at that holy man?"

Fakir Azizuddin, however, did not prove impervious to Billo's charms. It happened like this. One evening he went to see the Maharaja about an urgent piece of business, while the latter was sitting on a platform overlooking a tank in front of the Samman Burj, listening to Billo's singing. As the Maharaja looked absorbed, the Fakir took a chair by his side and waited for the song to end. Billo was singing one of her best *ghazals* from Hafiz, and she was doing so in her best style. The combination of the spiritual and the aesthetic proved too strong for the supersensitive mystic, who suddenly went into an ecstatic fit and, shouting "Allah-o-Akbar", jumped into the tank. The royal attendants jumped in after him and pulled him out. He, however, did not regain consciousness for a long time and did so only after several of the royal physicians had attended to him. Fakir Nuruddin does not seem to have been one of them. From that time on, whenever Fakir Azizuddin was announced while the Maharaja was attending a singing and dancing performance, the Maharaja would clap his hands as a signal for the performers to stop. In particular, he would order the Mirasis (accompanists) out, saying,

"Run away, you cuckolds, our Fakir Sahib is coming." The Punjabi word for cuckold, "bharua", is a term of affectionate and familiar abuse employed in speaking to inferiors and does not necessarily have any derogatory moral connotation. Why the poor Mirasis were ordered out has not been explained. Perhaps Fakir Azizuddin, with his highly developed aesthetic sense, did not like the way they have of prompting the singing girls by leading them or joining in their singing in their high-pitched voices. Besides, they are very seldom favoured with pleasing looks. There was, however, one number which Fakir Azizuddin does not seem to have grudged the Mirasis. It was the opening song in Persian, which, freely translated, runs thus:—

"God grant that thy star be always in the ascendant. May fortune always favour thee. May the flower of thy prosperity always blossom and may it rankle like a thorn in thine enemies' eyes."

Billo was not only the *prima donna* but also commanded the company of Amazons, which consisted of thirty or forty of the singing and dancing girls, handpicked for beauty of face and figure, playfulness and agility. Their uniform was as follows: a lemon-yellow banarsi turban with a bejewelled crest; a dark green jumper over a blue satin gown, fastened with a gold belt; deep crimson skin-tight pyjamas of *gulbadan* silk; and a pair of pointed golden shoes. As for jewellery, they wore a pair of gold earrings set with stones, a diamond nose-stud, a pair of gold bracelets and a ruby ring on the middle finger. Their accoutrement was completed by bows and arrows; but their arrows were less deadly than the glances of their eyes.

Chapter X

Honourable Subjects

There is a curious inner contradiction in the criticisms levelled at Ranjit Singh by hostile critics for his territorial acquisitions. Ranjit Singh had as good a right to found a kingdom for himself by the strength of his arms as any other man before or after him. Not sure of their ground in questioning this right in theory, such critics have, by a devious logic, maligned him for exercising it in practice. They have characterised his levying of tribute on the chiefs and sardars falling within the ambit of his projected kingdom and his annexing of their estates for their failure to pay it as inherently wrong acts — acts which in themselves constituted high-handedness, treachery, avarice and what not. They, however, do not say how else a kingdom can be, or has ever been, founded and maintained. Impartial critics, on the other hand, have acknowledged the fact that in achieving his ambitions Ranjit Singh used the barest minimum of force or craft necessary. Baron Charles Hugel, for example, says: "Never perhaps was so large an empire founded by one man with so little criminality; when we consider the country and the uncivilized people with whom he had to deal, his mild government must be regarded with feelings of astonishment." Similarly Captain Murray says: "It is difficult to suppress admiration in contemplating the career of such a man, who, with so many disadvantages, succeeded, with so few crimes, in elevating himself from a simple sardar to be the sovereign of a large kingdom, including Hindus and Mohammadans, as well as Sikhs, the only state in India not substantially under British dominion."

Even Sir Lepel Griffin, who has compiled a catalogue of what he considers as the Maharaja's wrongful confiscations of the estates of his friends, allies and servants, makes the following concessions to him:—

"With all his rapacity Ranjit Singh was not cruel or blood-thirsty. After the victory or the capture of a fortress he treated the vanquished with leniency and kindness, however stout their resistance might have been, and there were at his Court many chiefs despoiled of their estates but to whom he had given suitable employ, and who accepted their position with the resignation born of Eastern fatalism, which takes the sharpest sting out of defeat. The sardars who had been the leaders of the several confederacies which he overthrew were all in this fashion reduced from equality and rivalship to honourable subjection; and, in addition, there was a large group of Muhammadan Khans and nobles who would have received short shrift from Govind Singh, but whom Ranjit Singh attached to his fortunes, thereby materially strengthening his position in the western districts. The heads of the Mussulman tribes of Sial, Ghebas, Tiwanas and Kharrals, and the family of Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan were included in this group."

Sir Lepel Griffin could have added several other names, as for example, those of Nawab Kutbuddin of Kasur, the Nawab of Bahawalpur, Sardar Sultan Muhammad Khan, several other Barakzais and a number of Saddozai princes.

Sir Henry Lawrence sums up the Maharaja's considerateness in this respect in the following words:— "Members of deposed ruling families may be seen in Delhi and Kabul in a state of penury, but in the Punjab there is not to be seen a single ruling family whose territories may have been conquered by Ranjit Singh, and which may have been left

unprovided by him. Not only the Sikh ruling houses, but those of other faiths, too, were provided for by him with equal munificence."

Azizuddin and Nuruddin cite many instances of the assessment and realization of tribute, nazrana and other charges in which the Maharaja evinced an anxiety to avoid causing any undue hardship. Except in cases of open defiance or intransigence, it was customary for lengthy negotiations to be conducted with the vakils of the sardars and chiefs until a sum considered fair and reasonable by both the sides was agreed upon. Even after this, time was often allowed for making the payment. Not seldom assessments made and accepted were subsequently reduced. One particular practice in which the Maharaja always considered the needs of the people affected was the realization of nazrana on the death of sardars and chiefs. It was part of his plan to abolish excessive private wealth so as to augment the resources of the state, on the one hand, and to reduce wasteful private expenditure, on the other. Nevertheless, he always saw to it that the widows and children of deceased chiefs and sardars were left with ample resources to live decently. When any estate was taken over for default in the payment of nazrana or even for disobedience, the proprietors and their families were given adequate alternative jagirs. The estates of widows were taken over only in cases where there were no male heirs capable of managing the estates and protecting them against others, and in many such cases the Maharaja cast his mantle over the widows and brought them under his personal protection.

Fakir Azizuddin mentions an interesting case in this connection. Bhai Gurbakhsh Singh was an old and trusted servant of the Maharaja. During his last illness he sent a request to the Maharaja to pay him a visit. When the Maharaja arrived, he found five heaps of money on the floor, consisting of a lakh of rupees each. The Bhai had three sons and

a daughter. "Maharaj," said he, "I have made the distribution of my wealth as I am sure you yourself would have made it. Please grant these four heaps to my children with your own blessed hands. The fifth heap belongs to the Khalsa Durbar. Be gracious enough to accept it from my hands." What the Maharaja would have done, left to himself, is not known. However, he accepted the dispensation proposed by the clever Bhai.

Despite his studied effort to be coldly impersonal in the matter of collecting funds for the Durbar, Ranjit Singh sometimes could not help being affected by human considerations. It was to this that the Fakir brothers owed their narrow escape on one occasion from having to pay a hundred and fifty thousand rupees to the Maharaja. It was September, 1814. The Maharaja had just returned from his disastrous expedition to Kashmir, and the finances of the Durbar were in a low state. He asked Fakir Azizuddin if he and his brothers could together provide him with a hundred and fifty thousand rupees. Azizuddin replied with folded hands that, although his whole property and even his life were at the disposal of the Maharaja, all he possessed at the time was sixty thousand rupees. The Maharaja did not pursue the subject any further. Azizuddin mentions that he felt very unhappy at his inability to carry out the Maharaja's behest fully and unhappier still that the Maharaja had not accepted his humble offer of sixty thousand rupees. Although he does not say so — keeping up appearances in such matters was one of the aristocratic virtues of the day — it is open to conjecture that he could not at that time very well afford to part even with the amount he had offered. Ranjit Singh must have inferred this from his tone and manner and dropped the matter out of consideration for a loyal servant.

PART FIVE

A WEDDING AND A FUNERAL

Chapter I

Showers of Gold

March, 1837, was a gala month for the Punjab : it saw the wedding of the Maharaja's grandson, Prince Nau Nihal Singh, at Amritsar. The Maharaja had told his ministers and sardars that he wanted the wedding to be remembered by all who saw it and talked about by their children and their children's children. Preparations began early in 1837. Invitations were sent to the highest British officers, the Governor-General, the Commander-in-Chief and the Governor of Agra, and to all the principal chiefs and sardars between the Indus and the Sutlej. The Governor-General and the Governor of Agra sent their regrets; but the Commander-in-Chief accepted the invitation. So did most of the chiefs and sardars.

"On Magh 21, 1893 Sambat," reads an account of the wedding (in Persian) in the author's family papers, "Misr Beli Ram, the Bhai Sahibs and Sardar Attar Singh were commanded to go first to Prince Nau Nihal Singh and then to Prince Kharak Singh to take auguries about the date of the marriage. They were also told that they should take whatever they needed for distribution at the augural rites from the storehouse of Misr Lal Singh. Accordingly, Prince Kharak Singh took the augury and, having obtained a quantity of rupees, sovereigns and woollen wrappers from the

storehouse, distributed them among the augurs. The Maharaja was informed of this, whereupon he commanded the presence of Prince Nau Nihal Singh. On Magh 29, 1893 Sambat, Captain Wade informed the Maharaja that Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in-Chief, would come to attend the wedding. Prince Nau Nihal and the Bhai Sahibs paid their respects to the Maharaja in the afternoon and threw five hundred rupees over his head as alms to the poor. The Maharaja then commanded that Bibi Nakkain and Rani Chand Kaur should proceed to Amritsar. A sum of two hundred and fifty rupees was given to the royal ladies and orders were issued to the officials concerned to make arrangements for the entertainment of the Commander-in-Chief at Atari. On Phagan 1, 1893 Sambat, after the usual charities, Prince Kharak Singh was given a horse with a gold saddle, robes of honour, jewellery and cash and commanded to proceed to Amritsar to make arrangements for the wedding. Orders were issued to Laddha Singh and Fakir Imamuddin to arrange for the entertainment of the Prince and for a royal salute of guns. On Phagan 30, 1893 Sambat, the Prince was granted four thousand gold ducats for presentation during the *pashkara* ceremony, and orders were sent out to Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, Raja Gulab Singh, General Avitabile and Misr Rup Lal to attend the wedding. Accompanying a letter of Dewan Sawan Mal from Multan came a hundred rolls of gold-embroidered bedspreads, a hundred pairs of gold bangles and other articles; also three lakh and eight thousand rupees. The Jamadars of the four clothes stores were awarded one thousand and one hundred rupees each for making liveries. On Phagan 5, 1893 Sambat, Prince Nau Nihal presented himself to the Maharaja. The Maharaja told him that he ought not to believe mischief-mongers and assured him that he would attend his wedding.

On Phagan 6, Fakir Azizuddin presented Captain Wade



Prince Nau Nihal Singh

to the Maharaja. On the following day orders were issued for the posting of foot, horse and artillery to receive the Commander-in-Chief at the bridge. On the same date gold and silver articles were entrusted to Prince Nau Nihal Singh along with sweetmeats. Orders were issued for the daily entertainment of the Commander-in-Chief's camp in accordance with the advice of Bhai Ram Singh and Sham Singh Atariwala. The rations were 300 maunds of fine flour, 205 maunds of gram, 1000 maunds of firewood, 15 seers of butter, 50 seers of ghee, 15 seers of sugar candy, 1515 eggs, 1000 he-goats, an unspecified quantity of curd, and 40 maunds of sweetmeats. Bhai Ram Singh was ordered to proceed to Atari, to take stock of the stores and to purchase 101 head (each) of camels, cows, buffaloes and horses. In addition, 150 doshalas, 25 banarsi dopattas, 50 lachas, 56 large-sized uniforms, 2 gold-threaded doshalas, 2 gold saddles, 2 elephants with gold-encrusted howdahs and numerous gold ornaments were ordered to be kept ready. It was also ordered that 2 gold-enamelled utensils, 2 gold tumblers, 4 gold bowls, 8 gold flasks, 8 sets of silver utensils and an equal number of sets of brass utensils should be procured. In the way of provisions it was ordered that 2 store-rooms should be filled to capacity with flour, 2 with fowls, 2 with molasses and one with firewood and that 1000 cartloads each of fodder and grass, 100 cartloads of charpais and 500 clay vessels should also be provided.

"On Phagan 10, Captain Wade requested that Commandant Chet Singh be ordered to keep boats ready at the Hari Ghat for the crossing of the Commander-in-Chief. The Vakils of Nabha and Patiala were asked whether their chiefs would attend the marriage, and they replied in the affirmative. On Phagan 15, Captain Wade informed the Maharaja in the garden of Chhota Ram of the arrival of the Commander-in-Chief. In answer to a query by the Maharaja,

the Captain expressed the opinion that it would be best for the Commander-in-Chief's camp to be near the garden of Jawala Singh on the bank of the Ravi. He also proposed that the military parade should be held in the ground below the fort. On Phagan 19, the Maharaja left Lahore to attend the wedding, entered Amritsar by the Lahore gate and, showering gold and silver coins, proceeded to the Bhangi fort. All sardars present made their obeisances to him and the wedding rites began.

"Maharani Nakkain flung gold and silver coins over the heads of the Maharaja and Prince Kharak Singh. The Maharaja threw five hundred rupees and a handful of sovereigns into the ceremonial oil. Then he prepared with his own hands the ceremonial mixture of perfumes, oil, flour and ground pearls for the bridegroom. The oil and the mixture were applied to the bridegroom by one of the Bhai ladies. The Maharaja awarded her five hundred rupees for this and, at her request, also granted her a jagir. Sovereigns and rupees were also received from Atari as a good omen, and these were made over to the bridegroom. After watching a dancing performance for some time, the bridegroom left for his residence.

"On the 22nd, Prince Nau Nihal Singh proceeded through the bazar, showering gold and silver coins, and arrived at the Bhangi fort for the marriage ceremony. In the afternoon of the 23rd, the Maharaja, showering gold and silver coins on the way, proceeded to the Bhangi fort. There Raja Ladwa and Raja Suchet Singh presented elephants, horses, clothes and cash to the bride as her dowry and trousseau and also showered money over the heads of Prince Kharak Singh and Prince Nau Nihal Singh. The Maharaja awarded him 1,100 rupees as entertainment money.

"On the 24th a report was received from Kishan Chand

to the effect that the Commander-in-Chief had arrived near Amritsar. At that juncture Raja Gulab Singh arrived with five hundred of his best horsemen. Fakir Azizuddin was commanded to arrange for a salute of guns from Gobindgarh fort. Soon thereafter Raja Jaswant Singh Makarwala presented himself with horses and sumptuous dresses and he showered one thousand rupees over the Maharaja's head. After an exchange of courtesies he was dismissed with a present of two thousand and one hundred rupees.

"In the afternoon the Maharaja proceeded to the Shish Mahal, showering money on the way. Pleased with the wedding arrangements in Bhangi fort, he offered thanks to God and then entered the Shish Mahal. On the 25th, the Maharaja sent Prince Kharak Singh to receive Sir Henry Fane, the Commander-in-Chief. On the same day, some trans-Sutlej rajas paid their respects to the Maharaja and then took their leave. As there was unexpected delay in the arrival of the Commander-in-Chief, the Maharaja advanced to welcome him personally, accompanied by the whole court. He met the Commander-in-Chief and his party coming on elephants. The English officers stood up on their elephants and saluted the Maharaja, and the Commander-in-Chief transferred himself on to the Maharaja's elephant to travel together with him the rest of the way. The party entered the Shish Mahal with proper pomp and ceremony. A salute of guns was fired. Host and guest showered five thousand rupees over each other's head. The Maharaja pointed to a medal around the Commander-in-Chief's neck and inquired about it. The Commander-in-Chief explained that the medal and his knighthood were both awards from the British Government in appreciation of his services. Then the Maharaja presented nine thousand rupees and a hundred gold ducats to the Commander-in-Chief and ten thousand and five hundred rupees to the English members of his party by way of ziafat

(feast money). To these were added two horses, two elephants, viands, sweetmeats, forty ornamental bedsteads, silver utensils and two tents with silver poles, all of which were despatched to the Commander-in-Chief's camp. In the afternoon, Fakir Azizuddin was deputed to escort the Commander-in-Chief to the Bhangi fort for participation in the wedding ceremony. On arrival the Commander-in-Chief showered money over the Maharaja's head. For some time, host and guest were engaged in conversation. Then those present gave the Commander-in-Chief a thunderous ovation for his attendance at the wedding and the *tambol* ceremony began. The Sardars, Ministers, members and relations of the royal family and well-wishers made the following cash presents:—

(There follows a long list of cash payments, ranging from Rs. 40 to Rs. 77,519.)

"After the tambol ceremony, four robes of honour, four horses, two elephants, several jewels and many lengths of expensive cloth were presented by Prince Kharak Singh to the Commander-in-Chief, Captain Wade and Lieutenant Fane. Similarly, Prince Nau Nihal Singh presented twenty-one robes of honour to the principal dignitaries.

"In the evening, the Maharaja took his British guests to the Shish Mahal, wherefrom, after a short stay, the Commander-in-Chief returned to his camp, while the Maharaja proceeded to the Durbar Saheb for thanksgiving. In the afternoon the Maharaja went with Prince Nau Nihal Singh and troops to Boopa Rai. A severe storm of rain and hail was raging. In the morning of the 27th, after an inspection of the troops, the Maharaja accompanied the Commander-in-Chief to Atari. At the time of his departure, two thousand and five hundred gold ducats were showered over the elephant of Prince Nau Nihal Singh. A salute of guns was fired



Sardar Sham Singh Atariwala

when the royal party reached Atari. Sardar Sham Singh Atariwala came on foot to receive the Maharaja. The Maharaja accompanied him to his haveli (mansion), where the Sardar presented fifteen horses and a hundred gold ducats to his royal guest and twenty-five gold ducats each to the Commander-in-Chief and Princes Kharak Singh, Nau Nihal Singh and Sher Singh. From there the Maharaja proceeded to the baradari and the Commander-in-Chief to his camp. In the evening Fakir Azizuddin escorted the Commander-in-Chief to the Shalamar Garden, where there was a display of fireworks.

"On the 28th, the Maharaja rode around his pavilion and inspected the thousands of people who had assembled there. He ordered a cordon of foot and horse troops to be thrown round the crowd, prohibiting entry or exit without the permission of the troop commander. Then he sent the principal sardars into the crowd with bags of money and with orders to give a rupee to each person. The distribution took 8 hours.

"Thereafter the Maharaja despatched Prince Nau Nihal Singh to Amritsar along with the bride's palanquin. The troops were ordered to march to Mianmir and halt there. The Maharaja then took his guest of honour to the Shalamar Garden for festivity and entertainment. The Commander-in-Chief was fascinated by the setting and the arrangements. The Maharaja inquired if he had seen another garden like the Shalamar. The Commander-in-Chief replied that he had seen one in Paris on which many lakhs of rupees had been expended. Then the Maharaja asked the Commander-in-Chief if he had witnessed another wedding like that of Prince Nau Nihal Singh. The Commander-in-Chief replied that he had not and added that when the Governor-

General received an account of the wedding he would feel sorry that he had not attended it.

"At Kasur, after a feast on Chet 5, the Commander-in-Chief witnessed a parade of the Durbar artillery. On the 6th, the Commander-in-Chief, seated with the Maharaja in a silver bungalow constructed under the personal supervision of Fakir Nuruddin, witnessed a grand review of the army. On the 7th, Prince Nau Nihal Singh arrived at Lahore from Amritsar and was given a salute of guns. In the evening Fakir Azizuddin escorted the Commander-in-Chief to the fort, where there were illuminations, singing and dancing.

"On the 9th, in the afternoon, the British officers and their ladies paid a visit to the Maharaja. The Maharaja took the ladies to see Rani Nakkain, the mother of Prince Kharak Singh, who presented jewellery and cash to them. The Maharaja directed Fakir Nuruddin to have it announced by beat of drum that no suspicious characters should be allowed to enter the city, nor should any person interfere with the personnel of the Commander-in-Chief, on pain of severe punishment. The Commander-in-Chief and Captain Wade called on the Maharaja again on the 10th. On the 12th, the Commander-in-Chief joined the Holi celebrations and said that he had enjoyed them very much. On the same date the Maharaja delivered to Captain Wade a letter addressed by him to the Governor-General, expressing his gratification at the participation of the Commander-in-Chief in the wedding celebrations. On the 15th, under orders from the Maharaja, Prince Nau Nihal Singh presented a guard of honour to the Commander-in-Chief, who complimented the Maharaja on the discipline and turn-out of the guard and the commanding ability of the Prince. On the 18th, Fakir Azizuddin escorted the British guests into the presence of the Maharaja, who thanked them for their participation in the wedding. The

Commander-in-Chief in his reply expressed his gratitude for the excellent hospitality accorded to him. On the advice of Fakir Azizuddin the Maharaja gave his British guests further robes of honour as parting gifts. Prince Sher Singh was deputed to conduct them on their return journey. The Commander-in-Chief left for Ferozepur on the 19th. The Maharaja sent Guru Sadhu Singh to Kartarpur with robes of honour and with instructions that the guests should be entertained on their return journey at every stage and presented with robes of honour.

"On Aswaj 19, 1894 Sambat, the following presents were received from the Governor-General through Munshi Shahamat Ali in connection with Prince Nau Nihal Singh's marriage and produced on the same day before the Maharaja by Fakir Azizuddin:—

(1) a necklace of diamonds and pearls,
(2) a pair of armlets,
(3) a turban ornament,
(4) a pair of bracelets,
(5) a pair of diamond-studded bangles,
(6) 11 other pieces of jewellery,
(7) 105 western-style dresses,
(8) a gold bird-cage,
(9) a horse,
(10) a crystal service set.

"The Maharaja granted 500 rupees to Munshi Shahamat Ali and a similar amount to the present-bearers along with trays of sweetmeats."

This is a bare report of events drawn up by officials too

busy running the show to enjoy it, not to speak of describing it. Some of the British guests both enjoyed and described it, and we cannot do better than draw upon their accounts to add a little colour and detail to the official outline. The party that received the British Commander-in-Chief five miles outside Amritsar consisted of 3,000 horsemen, all splendidly attired. The most striking figure in the party was the Prime Minister, Raja Dhian Singh, who was covered with jewels hanging row upon row, about his neck, in his turban, on the belt of his sword and dagger, and over the whole of his dress. Even the saddle and bridle of the Persian horse he rode were embroidered with gold, the saddle cloth being of silver tissue. Prince Sher Singh wore a tiara of diamonds, emeralds and rubies. The officers of his suite blazed with jewels and cloth of gold and silver. The heir-apparent, Prince Kharak Singh, who led the advance party, does not seem to have attracted much notice. The Maharaja himself, when he met the Commander-in-Chief half way, was dressed plainly in yellow with a single row of pearls down the breast. His Sardars of State were clad in cloth of gold. While the Commander-in-Chief was travelling together with him on the royal elephant, the Maharaja plied him with innumerable questions about the composition of the British regiments, from the Colonel down to the privates, the English mode of casting artillery and manufacturing other weapons of war, the battles in which Sir Henry had fought and the strength of the East India Company's army. At the tambol ceremony the Maharaja and the bridegroom, whose face was covered with a golden veil, sat under a kind of Christmas tree laden with artificial oranges. The tambol paid in cash amounted to upwards of fifty lakhs of rupees.

The wreath used for the investiture of the bridegroom was of diamonds and pearls strung together with gold thread. The religious part of the ceremony was followed by

an all-night performance by the royal troupe of dancing girls, about 80 strong. At that time the Maharaja was in state dress, his breast shone with rows of great pearls and on his arm scintillated the famous Koh-i-Noor.

The money distributed among the sight-seers by putting a cordon of horsemen round them exceeded a million of rupees. The bride's dowry consisted of 101 horses, richly caparisoned with gold and silver trappings, 101 cows, 101 she-buffaloes, 10 camels, 11 elephants, gold and silver ornaments valued at several lakhs of rupees, gold and silver utensils, precious stones, rich silk fabrics and 500 pairs of cashmere shawls. The clothes forming part of the bride's trousseau alone covered an acre. The Shalamar Garden, on the night when it was the scene of festivities, looked like an Arabian Nights fairyland. There were rows of oil lamps on every possible spot where they could be put or hung. Even the branches of the trees had lamps growing on them. A highlight of the Holi festival was a battle fought by the Maharaja's guard of Amazons, between thirty and forty in number and armed with bows and arrows. The ammunition they used consisted of balls filled with powder of various colours, one of which exploded in the nicely combed beard of the Afghan Ambassador, giving his grave diplomatic face a momentary expression of horror at this indignity. He had to pay for this involuntary reaction by having his face, and especially his eyes, bombarded with colour balls. The British Commander-in-Chief had only one eye bombarded. Nobody says what happened to the Maharaja's single eye.

We can best conclude this account by adding to the list of wedding presents one from the chief British guest, Sir Henry Fane, which for obvious reasons escaped inclusion

in the official list: it is a passage in Sir Henry's "*Five Years in India.*" Here it is:—

> "Ranjit among his subjects has the character generally of a kind and generous master and one of the best princes that have ever reigned in India. As evidence of his being really a good and amiable man may be cited his kindness to children (two or three of whom he had crawling about the Durbar), and the fact of his never having, since he conquered the country, put a man to death for even the most heinous crime. His exceeding kindness and good nature throughout our entire visit, to all in any way attached to us, makes us believe that such is his real character. At all events it is certain that without the punishment of death this chief yet manages to keep his wild people in perfect subjection."

Chapter II

The Death Of A Lion

W. G. Osborne, Military Secretary to the Earl of Lake, Governor-General of British India, began his account of the funeral obsequies of Ranjit Singh in a letter to his superior with the following words:

"Ranjit Singh is dead, poor fellow! and died as like the old Lion as he had lived. He preserved his senses to the last, and was (which is unusual with native princes) obeyed to the last by all his chiefs. . . ."

It took a lot to kill the old lion — three strokes of paralysis in four years, several bouts of fever and dysentery, experiments by a whole host of allopathic, homoeopathic, ayurvedic and unani doctors and quacks and, last but not least, his absolute refusal to allow himself any rest.

The realization that his days were numbered came to Ranjit Singh on June 20, 1839, with a fresh attack of fever, after an uneasy respite, and a discharge of blood from the nose. For the first time he voiced the anxiety that had been preying upon his mind for years about the future of his kingdom after his death. It was to Fakir Azizuddin that he did so. Azizuddin, with his usual tact, avoided betraying the thought that the end was not far off. As if implying that the

Maharaja needed rest to help his recovery, he suggested the delegation of powers to Kharak Singh, who had already been designated as the successor as early as 1816. He also suggested the formal appointment of Dhian Singh as Prime Minister. The Maharaja was not one to delude himself. He asked Azizuddin point-blank whether it would not be a good idea to make a formal proclamation of succession. Azizuddin agreed that it would be a good idea and proceeded to draft the proclamation. It was read out on the following day at a durbar held after a review of the troops by Kharak Singh and Dhian Singh.

On June 22, the Maharaja became unconscious. The physicians in attendance, including Azizuddin, gave up all hope. Accordingly, in Sohan Lal's words (all the quotations that follow are from his *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*): "It was decided, as a point of policy, to get ready a bier worth Rs. 10,00,000 for the last day of the Sarkar." It was also decided that "a *sankalp* (ceremonial offering) of 100 horses with gold and silver harnesses and brocade, velvet and embroidered trappings and saddle-cloth and 500 cows be performed." The gatekeepers of the eastern, western and southern gates of the fort and the gate of Hazoori Bagh were ordered to guard the gates carefully and to allow nobody to come in. "As soon as this terrible news became known in the town of Lahore, noise and hue and cry arose from streets and bazars."

But the Maharaja, when he regained consciousness, thought all this to be premature. He, therefore, "issued an order for the performing of his *sucheta* and from all sides cries of congratulations arose high. After the performance of the *sucheta* the Sarkar ordered the presentation of the musicians, the bards and the singers and after that inspected the *chaukis*. After that the Sarkar issued an order to John Holmes, asking

him to march .... at midnight and go to Amritsar along with his platoons, 250 horsemen and some cannon and to establish himself firmly at the gates of the fort of Gobindgarh and not to show any kind of confidence in any one of his own (the Maharaja's) relatives and the like. An order was issued to the camp of Raja Hira Singh to establish themselves near the tomb of Anarkali .... The Raja Kalan (Dhian Singh) .... proposed in agreement with the Sarkar that .... the Sarkar should perform *sankalp* with his own blessed hand of so much property as (it) is reported to be the practice of the kings (to distribute at such a time), adding that all kinds of things and horses were present in the treasury of the Sarkar." Besides Rs. 22,000 in cash, the articles proposed for distribution were: "*lakhna* ornaments and jewellery, including the pearl necklace of Misr Dewan Chand, 11,000 armlets with green stones, ornamental bracelets, 8 gold rings, gold vessels, dishes, cups, jugs, 4 in number, 1 silver pitcher, 1 silver wash-basin, 1 ganga sagar, a silver short-stool, special suits of clothes, 11 *pashmina* badris having only one seam, 51 gold chairs, 1 silver chair, bejewelled and gold swords, one very well-inlaid shield, 1 bejewelled dagger, another of gold, 1 gun with a gold cover, 2 elephants with gold *howdahs*, 2 elephants with silver *howdahs*, 19 horses with silver, gold, plain, bejewelled and gold-threaded saddles, 101 pairs of bejewelled garlands without any string, 11 velvet, banat, plain and other canopies with poles of gold and silver." .... "At night the Raja Kalan (Dhian Singh), Sardar Ajit Singh, Raja Hira Singh, the Bhai Sahibs, Fakirji (Azizuddin) and Misr Ram Kishan remained present...."

On June 23, the Maharaja got up early in the morning and, calling for his special conveyance, went out for a drive. On his return, "he performed a *sankalp* of horses, elephants, 5 gold vessels, cups, jugs, etc., 51,000 rupees and a pair of bangles." Later in the day the royal physicians held a discussion.

"Fakir Azizuddin said that everything was in the hands of God .... In the meantime the Sarkar once again became senseless .... At the time of noon, when four hours of the day had passed, the Sarkar woke up and became alert as usual .... After that he took invigorating medicines, like gems, and, placing his head upon the pillow, lay down to take rest ...."

On June 24, "the Sarkar took medicines of gems and in his special conveyance went out to Baradariwala garden and returned. After that he went out to enjoy the sacred sight of a sadhu...." On his return he performed one more *sankalp*.

On June 25, the Maharaja was too weak to go out and became unconscious more than once. Raja Dhian Singh proposed that, as it was too hot in the Shish Mahal, the Maharaja should go down to the ground floor. The idea was that he should be made to lie down on the floor so that he should die in the lap of Mother Earth in the traditional Hindu manner. The Maharaja, however, showed displeasure at the suggestion: he was not yet ready to die. The Ministers, therefore, "proposed that from under the compound pieces of wood should be heaped upto the roof so that he might be made to go down at the time of loosening them." By the afternoon, "bodily and mental movements of the Sarkar became suspended" and the pulse became weak and intermittent.

Early in the morning of June 26, "the Sarkar had the honour and pride of enjoying the sacred sight of the Adi Granth and Baba Granth and made a prostration before them." He was administered a new medicine, which revived him a little. Taking advantage of this, he made a further *sankalp* of eight lakhs of rupees, his special conveyance, elephants with gold and silver howdahs and horses with gold

and silver trappings. Thereafter, "the Sarkar undid the weapons from his waist and handed them over to the servants with the words that..... the last moment had drawn near." The servants broke down. There were tears in the Maharaja's eyes, too. A little later, "51 cows, 11,000 gold ducats, many swift-footed horses and many suits of clothes were given away in *sankalp*."

Bhai Govind Ram brought up the subject of the Koh-i-Noor. The Maharaja, he recalled, had often remarked that none of the kings who had possessed the diamond before him had taken it away from this world along with himself. He had, therefore, had a mind to entrust the affairs of his kingdom to Kanwar Kharak Singh, make a pilgrimage to the various sacred places and present the Koh-i-Noor personally to the temple of Jagannath. Now that the moment of his departure from the world had come all of a sudden, asked the Bhai, what was his pleasure? The Maharaja made a sign to say that the diamond should be sent over to the temple of Jagannath. Then Bhai Govind Ram mentioned that the Maharaja had already ordered Raja Dhian Singh to do so: the latter had, however, replied that it was for Kanwar Kharak Singh and not for him to carry out the order. The order, Bhai Govind Ram continued, had accordingly been communicated to Kanwar Kharak Singh. The latter, however, had stated that the diamond was with Misr Beli Ram. On hearing this, Jamadar Khushal Singh asked Misr Beli Ram to produce the diamond; but the latter began to put forward excuses and replied that it was in Amritsar.... "The Sarkar produced wrinkles upon his forehead on hearing this discussion. After that, according to a request by Bhai Govind Ram, two armlets with diamonds worth Rs. 2 lakhs, several bejewelled ornaments, 8 top hats of the Persian style, 2 elephants with gold seats and Rs. 5 lakhs in cash were given away in *sankalp*. After that the Sarkar put on all his ornaments

and then removed them from every limb of his body and, making a prostration by resting his head upon the earth, gave them away in *sankalp*."

"On the 15th of Har (27th June, 1839 A.D.), a Thursday, within three hours the Sarkar had nine successive motions and the movement of his lips stopped and. . . .his pulse left altogther its normal course. . . .Fakir Raza (Azizuddin) said, with his eyes full of tears and his heart full of anxiety, that he was a Mussulman and knew that it was the last hour . . . . With these words he came out and all began to weep and cry . . . . After that the Sarkar got up again at about noon and felt severe pain developing into his final restlessness and uneasiness . . . ." A little later, Raja Suchet Singh came to present himself. "The Sarkar opened his eyes once and cast an unconcerned look and closed his eyes again, and the pulse left beating altogether. After that the Sarkar was made to lie straight . . . . upon the bed, which had been set right with all the requisites of the last day, like *doshalas*, *tulsi* leaves, gold ducats, linseed and so on and, lighting up a gold lamp, gave it away by way of *sankalp* along with other things. After that they made him sit upon a wooden stool and, washing his blessed hair with Ganges water and curd, dressed him in new clothes . . . . Bhai Gobind Ram said into the ear of the Sarkar, at the moment he was expiring, the words, 'Ram, Ram,' three times. The Sarkar repeated them twice, but at the third time his lips did not open and his life went out of him by way of his eyes . . . . Emphatic orders were issued for closing up the doors of the fort and Rajaji (Dhian Singh) ordered that a gold and silver bier must be got ready along with other things very soon. This dreadful news became known to the ladies and they began to cry and weep . . . . and got ready to burn themselves alive. The Raja Kalan went to them to set their grieved hearts at rest and said that the Kanwar (Kharak Singh) would be looking to their needs, considering them as his real

mothers as before ...., remarking further that everything other than the Sarkar himself would be available.... to them."

Raja Dhian Singh next went into the octagonal tower to set at rest the minds of Rani Kattochan (Guddan) and the other ranis. Rani Kattochan, daughter of Sansar Chand, used to observe strict purdah. On this occasion she came out of the seraglio "without any hesitation, with her open face, with her bright looks and with her glowing forehead" into the presence of Dhian Singh and said that "assurances were necessary for those who had to live after the death of the Sarkar and added that she was going to accompany the stirrup of the Sarkar" into the other world. The other ranis gave him a similar reply.

The Maharaja's body lay in state on the floor during the night. "All those who were present remained weeping and crying all night, while the Brahmins kept on reading the Gita and the Bishan Shahasaranam and the Bhais remained busy in reciting the Granth Sahib."

On June 28, "Kanwarji (Kharak Singh) took his bath and put on clothes like *dhoti*, *uparna* and so on and making the Sarkar sit on a wooden stool, bathed him in the water of the Ganges and made him put on a turban and a suit of clothes perfumed with saffron, and decorated the body of the Sarkar with ornaments, such as a bejewelled plume, a bejewelled turban gem, a bejewelled hand-chain, a pearl necklace, a bejewelled armlet and a diamond ring. After that he made the Sarkar lie down on the bier with one pillow under his head and another under his cheek and, sending for a doshala from the clothes store, spread it over him. After that all the chieftains and near attendants presented doshalas."

At this stage "the news came that the ladies had made a *sankalp* of all their estates, ornaments and other belongings and, handing over the receipts of the revenue tax of the spring crop to the *kardars*, had presented themselves near the gate, fully decorated and adorned. Kanwarji (Kharak Singh) ran to the door .... to receive them and threw himself at their feet. The ladies uttered prayers for him and put their hands upon his back and patted him." Then the ladies left their special conveyance and entered "with glowing foreheads, bright looks, resplendent cheeks, laughing and dancing ...., looking like figures of the spiritual world, and approached the Sarkar."

When Raja Dhian Singh had gone into the octagonal tower on the previous evening to give assurances to the ranis, one of them, namely, Hardevi, had tauntingly reminded him of a previous statement of his that "he would always remain with the stirrup of the Sarkar." Dhian Singh had kept quiet; but he now appeared in fine clothes and covered with ornaments and "declared that he had a mind to join the stirrup of the Sarkar." Kharak Singh and others threw down their turbans at his feet, saying that the kingdom could not go on without him. A heated debate followed as to whether the scriptures required or permitted ministers to burn themselves with their kings. The question was at last resolved by the intervention of Rani Kattochan, who in a tone of authority commanded Dhian Singh to agree that he would remain in the service of the new king for a year, after which he would be free to retire and go away to the sacred places. This was agreed upon by all concerned and reduced to writing. The funeral procession then left the fort. "The Sarkar was lifted up on a glorious bier and weeping and crying .... arose from all sides .... All the surviving ladies, including Gul Begum, wept very bitterly and fell senseless on the ground." The four



Raja Dhian Singh

ranis who had resolved upon burning themselves on the Maharaja's pyre, followed his bier on foot, dressed in their bridal costumes and jewellery. The streets of the city were lined with people, row upon row. As the cortege passed, people cried and prayed aloud, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, all in their own way. The ranis kept taking off their jewels and throwing them to the poor.

The bier was taken to the garden near the gate at the foot of the Badshahi mosque and the Maharaja's body, after being given a bath, was laid on a pile of sandalwood. Prayers were offered for about an hour by members of all communities in their respective ways. Then the four queens, led by Rani Kattochan, walked up to the pyre. Rani Kattochan seated herself in the middle of the pyre with the Maharaja's head in her lap. The other three ranis seated themselves round her, with seven maidservants forming an outer circle. Before the pyre was lit, Rani Kattochan asked Kharak Singh and Dhian Singh to go up to her and, placing Dhian Singh's hand on the Maharaja's chest, made him swear aloud that he would befriend and support Kharak Singh. Thereafter she made Kharak Singh swear in a similar way that he would never go against Dhian Singh. Kharak Singh then set the pyre alight. There was a gentle shower after some time. A pair of pigeons came out of the sky and fell into the flames.

THE END

EPILOGUE

A Wreath of Choice Tributes

Sir Alexander Burnes.— "I never quitted the presence of a native of India with such impressions as I left this man. Without education and without a guide he conducts all the affairs of his kingdom with surprising energy and vigour, and yet wields his power with a consideration quite unprecedented in an Indian prince."— Travels into Bukhara, etc., 1834.

Captain J. D. Cunningham.— "Ranjit Singh found the Punjab a waning confederacy, a prey to the factions of its chiefs, pressed by the Afghans and the Mahrattas and ready to submit to English supremacy. He consolidated the numerous petty states into a kingdom, he wrested from Kabul the fairest of its provinces, and he gave the potent English no cause for interference."— History of the Sikhs, 1849.

Alex Gardner.— "The Maharaja was indeed one of those master-minds which only require opportunity to change the face of the globe."— Memoirs of Alex Gardner, 1898.

General John Gordon.— "He managed better than others more learned to transact the current duties of his State by means of his retentive memory, quickness of mind, and keen observation......... His court was brilliant with oriental pageantry, but personally he was free from pomp and show, and so scrupulously simple in his dress among his

gorgeously clad Sardars as to be distinguished among the distinguished."— The Sikhs, 1904.

Victor Jacquemont.— "His conversation is like a nightmare. He is almost the first inquisitive Indian I have seen...... The most skilful of our diplomats is a complete simpleton (in comparison with him)." Letters from India, 1834.

Sayed Muhammad Latif.— "He entertained great respect for learning and learned men. His Secretaries were in perpetual attendance on him, and he had the papers read out to him in Persian, Punjabi or Hindi, and he saw that his orders were drawn up in due form and that the drafts met his views......... His appearance was prepossessing, his manner and address were delightful, and his features were full of animation and expression. His remaining eye was large, quick and searching, and its fire and brilliancy displayed at once the great acuteness and energy of mind of its owner."— History of the Punjab, 1891.

John C. Marshman.— "He possessed the same grand creative genius as Sevajee and Hyder Ali."— History of India, 1874.

W. L. M'Gregor.— "...... it is evident that he is no common character, but possessed of powers of mind rarely met with, either in the eastern or western world."— The History of the Sikhs, 1846.

Captain Murray.— "Ranjit Singh has been likened to Mehemet Ali and to Napoleon...... There are some points in which he resembles both; but estimating his character with reference to his circumstances and position, he is perhaps a more remarkable man than either................ There was no ferocity in his disposition and he never punished a criminal

with death even under circumstances of aggravated offence. Humanity indeed, or rather a tenderness for life, was a trait in the character of Ranjit Singh. There is no instance of his having wantonly imbued his hands in blood."— History of the Punjab, 1846.

Captain Leopold Von Orlich.— "In battle, he was always seen at the head of his troops and foremost in combat......... ... In energy of will and endurance he was unequalled by any of his people. The want of education was covered by the splendid mental powers with which nature had endowed him, and prudence and knowledge of mankind enabled him to maintain himself in his high position. By means of excessive liberality he attached faithful servants and brave warriors to himself."— Travels in India, 1845.

W. G. Osborne.— "He was one of that order of minds which seem destined by nature to win their way to distinction and achieve greatness............ He rules with a rod of iron, it is true, but in justice to him it must be stated that, except in actual open warfare, he has never been known to take life, and his reign will be found freer from any striking acts of cruelty and oppression than those of many more civilized monarchs."— The Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh, 1840.

Lt. Col. Steinbach.— "The treasures (of Ranjit Singh) may be estimated to have amounted at his decease to about eight crores of rupees in cash, or the same number of millions of pounds sterling with jewels, shawls, horses, elephants, etc., and several millions more............it is doubtful if any court in Europe possesses such valuable jewels as the court of Lahore."— The Punjab, 1846.

GLOSSARY

The less familiar oriental words and phrases of which the meanings are not clear from the text.

Azan—	The Muslim call to prayer.
Az Qarar-Hakim-i-Ashraf—	In accordance with the exalted (i.e. royal) order.
Banarsi dopatta—	A wrapper made in Banaras
Baradari—	A summer house with twelve doors.
Bhagat—	A Hindu devotee.
Charpai—	A bedstead.
Chauki—	A police or military post.
Choudhry—	A headman.
Daftar—	Office, department.
Dal—	Army.
Darogha—	A Superintendent.
Dewan—	Manager.
Dhoti—	A loin cloth.
Diwali—	The Hindu festival of light.
Dewan of Hafiz—	Poetical works of the Persian Poet Hafiz.
Dohai—Sarkar—	"Protection Your Highness"
Doshala—	A double shawl.
Fateh—Naseeb	Of victorous destiny
Ghat—	A quay; a wharf.
Ghazal—	A lyric.
Ghee—	Melted butter
Haveli—	A mansion.
Hazar—	Thousand.
Holi—	The Hindu festival of colour.
Id-ul-Fitr—	A Muslim festival.

Jagir— A fief.
Jagirdar—A fief-holder.
Jagirdari—The system of fief holding.
Ji— An honorific suffix.

Kalghi— A crest, a plume.
Kanwar— Prince.
Kotwal— Prefect of Police.

Lacha— A wrapper for the lower half of the body.
Lakh— A hundred thousand.

Mohalla— Street.
Mufti— A Muslim Jurist.
Mulahiza-shud— Examined.

Nazrana— A present, tribute.
Nayaz— An offering.

Palki— A palanquin.
Panch— A member of a council of five.
Pashmina—A woollen fabric.
Pujari— A worshipper.

Sabt-i-Sarishta-i-Huzur shud—Registered in the Privy Office.
Sambat— A Hindu era.
Sawar— Horseman.
Shariat— The Muslim revealed law.
Shastra— The Hindu Holy Code.
Shikari— Hunter.
ShishMahal—A glass house.

Tambol— A cash present made at a wedding.
Toshakhana— A treasury, a store house.

INDEX

About This Book

This is an illuminating pen-portrait of one of the most remarkable figures in Indian history. Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) began his career as a boy of 12, when, on the sudden death of his father, he succeeded to a chiefdom—one of the smallest of many—into which freebooters and soldiers of fortune had parcelled out the Punjab after the decay of the Mughal Empire. Before he was 20, he had brought all rival chiefdoms under his control and established himself as the Maharaja of the Punjab. In that role he stopped the westward advance of the British Empire in India for half-a-century, on the one hand, and reconquered all the Indian territory annexed by Afghan kings, on the other. At the time of his death, his kingdom extended from Tibet to Sind and from the Khyber Pass to the Sutlej. He achieved all this by a combination of military skill and political acumen of an order exhibited by only a small number of men in all history.

His personality was a mixture of many apparent contradictions. Filled with unbounded ambition, he had a horror of cruelty and treachery. He never put a vanquished enemy to death and never left him unprovided for. Although he ruled a turbulent community with an iron rod, he never inflicted the death sentence even for the most heinous crime, including an attempt on his own life. Completely illiterate, he had a great respect for learning.

Himself a plain-looking man, with a face deeply pitted and an eye blinded by smallpox, he was fond of handsome men, beautiful women, good-looking children and spirited horses. Simple to the point of asceticism in his personal dress, he liked his courtiers to dress sumptuously. An orthodox Sikh, he respected and patronised all other religions. Although he ruled in the name of the Khalsa, his was a secular state, governed by people belonging to all communities. An ardent nationalist, he employed Frenchmen, Italians, Americans and Englishmen in important posts like those of generals, governors and envoys. He had several love affairs, but he was never wanting in consideration to any of his numerous wives. Although he had his favourites, he kept his court and his palace free of intrigue.

With so many variegated strands in his character, Ranjit Singh easily lends himself to being misunderstood and misrepresented, and this is the fate he has actually suffered at the hands of many who have written about him. This book presents a true picture of him based on first-hand accounts left in their private papers by three men who were in the closest contact with him throughout his reign. These were the three famous Fakir brothers, Azizuddin (his Foreign Minister), Nuruddin (his Home Minister) and Imamuddin (Governor of one of his key forts). The author is the great-great-grandson of Nuruddin.